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THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH
IN SCHOOLS

THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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THE
TEACHING OF ENGLISH
IN SCHOOLS

A SYMPOSIUM
EDITED FOR THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION
BY

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WITH A FOREWORD BY
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FOREWORD

I AM glad to accept an invitation to write an introductory note to this stimulating and thought-provoking book. Happily a foreword is not a review and I am under no obligation to indicate any points in the various essays with which I feel inclined to disagree. The contributors, writing with obvious conviction and not without vigour, will, I am sure, expect disagreement and will even be glad of it if that means that the issues they raise are receiving serious attention.

I hope, therefore, that the effect of the book will be to impart fresh point and vigour to the perennial debate and that the debate will continue on the high level of well-criticised experience that the contributors to this volume have set.

The need for this is now stronger than ever, and the concern in it belongs to the whole nation, not to teachers alone, still less to teachers of English alone. Whether we will or no, the world is looking to this country of ours for a lead in many things, not least in all that concerns the future of the English language. We ourselves, with our Dominions and the mighty U.S.A., have contrived to produce a world in which countless people of other tongues have now to learn English whether they like it or not. Yet we have done little enough, so far, to help them and have paid all too little attention to the effects upon the language of such world-wide diffusion.

A fact all too little noted is that rather less than one-fourth of the people in the world who now speak English as a mother tongue live in these islands. So we can hardly expect to be accepted as authoritative legislators for all the uses of the language everywhere. But here, in this historic home of English speech, we should at least set a model that commands respect and equip ourselves as worthy inter-

preters of a unique literary inheritance. The world will certainly expect that of us as being, in a sense, the keepers of the house. I suspect it will place upon us that special responsibility.

So much for the duty we shall owe to the world at large. But closely related to it is the duty we owe to ourselves in an internal social and cultural situation that is now changing so profoundly. In the eighteenth century, that great literary age, standards of taste and usage were set by a relatively small but highly cultivated reading and writing public. Moreover, control was all the more secure as English was very little spoken beyond these islands. The industrial and social revolutions have changed all that, bringing universal literacy, the popular press, the radio, many new forms of entertainment, together with new ranges of experience for which acceptable modes of expression have to be found.

We may well ask whether any attempt, in such circumstances, to set and maintain standards, is not hopeless from the start. I do not think so. In any case the attempt has to be made, and that not for national reasons alone. Is not the whole life of the developing self more deeply involved in the acquisition and use of the mother tongue than in almost any other learning activity of the years of growth? Self-respect, good taste, orderliness and precision of thinking, and indeed the whole structure of the developing intellectual and emotional life, are all very directly and intimately concerned. The most potent and pervasive instrument for influencing all these is the teaching of the mother tongue. It is unnecessary here to enter into disputed questions of dialect or of what precisely is meant by Standard English. Our task is clear. It is the double one of ensuring, first, that the language is used with that respect for self and tongue alike that one has the right to expect from educated people, and secondly, that the inheritors of a great literature shall learn in some degree to enjoy and appreciate their treasure.

Fortunately we can now hope for improved opportunities for the fulfilment of the task, looking forward as we do to such prospects as those of a much-widened range of secondary education, the raising of the school-leaving age, and the facilities to be offered at a peculiarly favourable period of life by the new County Colleges.

To all these considerations I have mentioned it will be agreed, I think, that the contributors to this volume show themselves to be keenly alive. I am particularly struck by one feature which, so far as I can judge, is common to all the authors. Not only do they write from long experience in the work of teaching : they also hold firmly to the sound criterion of what they have learned of the needs, the difficulties and the native tastes of the ordinary pupil. Pervading all the chapters one can detect a profound concern for the pupil himself, together with insight into his needs and possibilities such as could only be acquired through long experience.

If, finally, I might be permitted to offer tributes of especial gratitude, they would go to Mr. Strong for his timely protest against the damming-up of the springs of natural enjoyment of poetry and his lively exposition of a better way, and to Miss Gradon for the very necessary distinctions she draws concerning grammar, and her timely protest against the pedantries which still do so much harm in the handling of English grammar in school.

May the volume serve to put fresh kick into the perennial debate and bring us all nearer to that enlarged and clarified vision which we shall now need so badly.

F. CLARKE

Jan. 14th, 1946

I

POETRY IN THE SCHOOL

BY L. A. G. STRONG

BEFORE we can begin to think constructively about poetry in the classroom, we have to face a very unpleasant fact.

Young children, when they come to school, show a natural aptitude for poetry. They love rhythm in words, they are readily moved by it, they often write rhymes and jingles which have a fresh spontaneous quality. At the lowest, they have no prejudice against poetry.

Yet the great majority of adults in these islands are indifferent to poetry, if not actually hostile to it. It disgusts them, embarrasses them, or produces no effect on them whatever.

What has happened? What has gone wrong? What have the schools done, in order to produce this disastrous result? How has the first innocent capacity for pleasure been corrupted and destroyed?

Here some teachers will protest. Anxious to avert the charge of having mishandled this part of their job, they will object that the change is due, not to anything that happens in the classroom, but to the nature of the young British animal. He or she, they assert (but more particularly he), grows out of the first liking for poetry, and develops a natural resistance which no teaching can overcome.

The answer to this is that it is not true. At schools where poetry is handled with tact and understanding, by teachers who love it and *are able to communicate their love of it*, boys and girls do not develop the traditional British hostility to this form of art, but retain an unashamed pleasure in it which grows with them and which they take away with them into adult life.

It is because poetry has been mistaught and mishandled

by teachers unfit to deal with it that we, as a nation, fail to get pleasure from the art in which our literature is richest. We have the finest storehouse of poetry in the world, and ninety-nine per cent of us neither know nor care anything at all about it.

For this state of affairs the schools are to blame.

✓ Poetry has been mishandled in the classroom in a number of ways for a number of reasons. Chief of the reasons have been :

- (1) The teacher has disliked it.
- (2) The teacher has been embarrassed by it.
- (3) The teacher has been suspicious of all forms of emotion.
- (4) The teacher has been indifferent to poetry, and has seen in it merely an opportunity for asking questions and awarding marks.
- (5) The teacher has loved it uncomprehendingly, and for irrelevant reasons.
- (6) The teacher has genuinely loved it, but has been unable to communicate his love to others.

There are other reasons, but in a paper of this length it will be sufficient to consider half a dozen.

1. An active dislike of poetry is not rare among adults in Britain. It can be a branch of our national Philistinism and suspicion of all the arts. It can be part of our national distrust of ideas. It can arise from the strictly academic point of view which, realising that the arts are imponderable and not subject to so-called scientific analysis, sees that they cannot be marked out of a hundred, and dislikes them accordingly. In the same way, this type of mind can look on any artistic subject as a soft option, with the same result.

A great deal of the current British hostility to poetry dates from the careers of Byron and Shelley, reinforced by that of Oscar Wilde, which have connected it with effeminacy, goings-on, incapacity for sport, etc. etc. : all of it jam for this sort of teacher. He may show his contempt

for poetry openly, in which case the harm he does will depend on the way in which his pupils look upon him. The better liked he is, the more harm he will do : but, at the worst, his capacity for harm will be limited by his direct personal influence.

If, on the other hand, he is conscientious and tries to conceal his feelings, he can be far more dangerous. He will almost inevitably work off his dislike in the way he teaches the hated subject. He will apply to poetry the methods and treatment which are most alien from its spirit. He will enforce it as a discipline. He will regard it as an inferior and inaccurate way of conveying information, set factual questions on it, and make his class learn large and unsuitable pieces by heart. Flogging himself on to deal sufficiently with this thing which he so much dislikes, he will inspire dislike of it far more deeply and widely than his colleague who openly pooh-poohs it.

Much of No. 1's mishandling of poetry in the classroom may coincide with No. 4's, but we can reserve our consideration of further abuses until we come to No. 4.

2. The teacher who is embarrassed by poetry offers a different problem from the one who actively dislikes it, because his embarrassment covers a potential susceptibility. If things had been otherwise, he could have responded to it. He is a man of feeling whom poetry happens to rub the wrong way. He may respond to music, but he cannot tolerate the music of words, which are for him the labels of things he has to live with. He may respond to painting, but resent the pictorial use of words.

The harm this man does depends on the fact that he is not insensitive to all art, and the pupil who sees this may acquire an unbalanced view of poetry. Nothing is more quickly communicated than a feeling of embarrassment : and even though the teacher may not be respected, the embarrassment tends to remain, and to be associated, however vaguely, with the subject which gave rise to it.

It must never be forgotten, too, that many children are

themselves embarrassed by poetry because it calls up feelings which they prefer to conceal.

The harm done by the No. 3 type of teacher is more general, but poetry can be badly affected by it. Suspicion of all emotion seems to be a vice of women teachers more than of men. At many schools they have been so busy teaching the girls to be young gentlemen that some of the natural outlets for emotion have been dammed up, and the girls look upon poetry as unworthy of a robust and serious attitude to life. Mr. E. M. Forster has said of our public schools that they develop the body well, the mind passably, and the emotions not at all. What he says applies even more strongly to several kinds of girls' school, which do even greater violence to the nature of their pupils.

No. 4 teacher is every bit as dangerous, because he has nothing at all to restrain him. Poetry means nothing to him, but he does not actively shrink from it. He teaches it cold-bloodedly, and in all the wrong ways. He makes it yield dividends. He gives marks for it. He asks his pupils to paraphrase it. He sets questions on what he considers to be its subject matter. His apathy, his lack of any idea that poetry is to be enjoyed and can add to life, may in the long run be more damaging than embarrassment or active hostility.

Certain public examinations, to our shame, still ask candidates to paraphrase pieces of poetry. Mr. I. A. Richards has dealt with this practice in a passage which he quotes in his book *Basic English and its Uses* :

. . . the terms of the task set him [the pupil] are something of an outrage on his intelligence. He is given an original which presumably he respects ; he is asked — under the unfair condition that he may use none of the best words because these have been used already by the original — to build up a cluster of words which will, so far as he can contrive, be an equivalent. The better reader he is, the more closely will he realise that what he is being asked to do is something not only presumptuous but impossible and absurd.

But the harm goes even deeper. Ask anyone to paraphrase a poem, and you at once give him the idea that the things it says can be said in another way. You suggest that a poem is a sort of fancy dress for a statement that can be made equally well in plain prose. That examining bodies should inculcate such a heresy is disgraceful.

A poem is the only way of saying something which must otherwise remain unsaid. Its form is as inseparable from its content as the body of a human being from the personality which it expresses. The meaning of the poem is the poem as it stands. If the wretched pupil is made to "put it into his own words", the result will be nobody's words, and nothing whatever to do with the poem. Only dislike of poetry, or crass misunderstanding of what it is, could have devised such an exercise.

The occasional explanation of a reference in this or that line of a poem is a very different matter. What is vicious and indefensible is the attempt to translate the so-called substance of the poem out of its own terms into prose. Small wonder if some children think that poetry is a subsidiary, affected form of statement, having as little connection with reality as a ham-frill with a ham.

Nos. 5 and 6 can be taken together. No. 5 loves poetry for reasons that have less to do with itself than with himself. Just as some people use music in order to wallow in a warm-bath of their own personal feelings, so he is stimulated by poetry to floods of unrelated emotion. Like a man who falls in love, not with a real girl, but with his own picture of one, which he proceeds to hang round the unfortunate real girl's neck, this sort of poetry-lover fastens his own emotions upon a poem and then believes that the poem has created them. As a result, he misreads the poem, and gives a wholly unreal version of it to his class.

Such people can cherish a picture of the whole of a poet's work which the poet would not recognise. For instance, I have heard teachers putting over with fervent faith a view of Walter de la Mare which ignored three-

quarters of his work and all the essential quality of his mind : reducing him to the stature of their own pretty-pretty notions and feelings.

Here again the harm done can be serious. Once let the boy or girl get the idea that the poet is no bigger than the teacher's appreciation of his work : once let them believe in disgust that he really is represented by that mimsy-whimsy stuff the teacher gets so worked up about : and poetry has had another blow.

Yet I am inclined to believe that No. 6 is the worst of the lot. He loves poetry — obviously — yet all he can do is to make it sound ridiculous. "Listen to this, boys," he says. "Isn't it beautiful?" And he proceeds to quack or mouth or bleat out something which is a travesty of the beauty which has truly moved him. Either his voice is charged with emotion which he cannot get across, or he reads dully and without rhythm, or the noise he makes is ugly and absurd. Derision is the only reply to anything spoken in such a manner and by such a voice.

Both Nos. 5 and 6 are much addicted to giving their classes poems to learn by heart. Here again, in their missionary zeal, they tend to rely on their own taste and fail to consider that of the pupil. I was put off Milton for years by a fool who made me learn the *Sonnet on his Blindness* when I was eleven. Nothing can be sillier than to set a child a poem to learn by heart before he has reached the stage at which he can appreciate it. Such attempts to force adult taste on immature minds do incalculable harm.

Teaching of this kind defeats its own object, as does every attempt to impose what can only come by natural development.

"But how," indignantly cries a certain kind of teacher, "how is the child to know what is good if we don't tell him?"

To which the answer is that the first step towards appreciation is enjoyment : and no one can genuinely

appreciate what he has not enjoyed. A child is none the better for knowing, academically and theoretically, that such-and-such a poem is good. Unless his own pleasure in it tells him so, the fact means nothing at all. He is no nearer to good taste or good judgment.

The great fault of our English teaching has been that so few of us have the courage of our own tastes, or are capable of judging for *ourselves*. *Nine out of ten of us* want to know the author's name before we venture an opinion. How are we to get good taste? How are we to teach it?

Certainly not by precept. The imposition of a set of arbitrary standards, the dogmatic assertion that certain poems are good and certain poets are great, are valueless, until the class has experienced the poems, and harmful if for any reason the poems are beyond their reach.

Consider what may happen when you tell a class of twenty that — let us say — *Lycidas* is a great poem. Of the class, a quarter like and admire you. For your sake, they will read the poem and try to like it. Two of three will really like it. Grand. A few more will pretend to like it, in order to please you. Very bad. Others will fail to like it, and feel guilty because they have bad taste. Even worse. A few in the class don't like you, and are put off the poem by the fact that you praise it. Baddish. The remainder of the class is indifferent, and doesn't take much notice one way or the other.

It is clear that you are apt to do more harm than good by your recommendation. There is far too much insincerity in matters of taste as it is: and to give children a bad conscience, to make them feel that what they like cannot be good, is the devil's work. Our own bad taste is worth more to us than other people's good taste. It is at least honest, and our own.

Does it follow that the teacher must never recommend a poem, or give his opinion in its favour? I do not see why he should not do so *provided that he is asked*, and pro-

vided that he does not use his opinion as a weapon. In any case, to use one's personal influence deliberately is an illegitimate way of teaching. It is hitting below the belt. "Do it to please me" is bad, save in very exceptional instances. "Like it to please me" is damnable always.

The teacher's opinion of a poem, if asked for, should be given as his personal opinion, his vote in the poem's favour. He should answer honestly any question which is put to him, but never use his prestige or any other advantage conferred on him by his age or position in order to carry an aesthetic point. The boy or girl who thinks the poem a rotten one is entitled to the opinion, but should be invited to justify it: and if the teacher feels obliged to point out that the weight of experienced criticism over a period of years is in the poem's favour, he should in duty add that experienced critics often differ radically in their appreciation of individual poems, and that here and now what matters to each one of us is whether the poem says to us the things we need to hear.

The skilled teacher will, however, save his pupils from such acute conflicts, as far as possible, by introducing them to poems which lie within their range.

I believe that half the problems in teaching come from failure to gauge the pupil's possible range of appreciation. If this seems a platitude, I can reply that the classroom is daily furnishing examples of this very failure, and on a disastrous scale.

Take for a moment the question of children's reading in general. I am always bumping against instances of well-meaning parents who, on the basis of their own views and feelings, starve their children of the sort of reading they want and need. Children go through various stages of development, from the nursery onwards, and each has its appropriate food in print. There is, with small boys at any rate, a bloodthirsty stage, and a stage which enjoys knock-about farce. Parents who frown on reading which satisfies the former because they hate bloodshed and

violence, and on the latter because the comic papers which cater for it are so often fatuous and vulgar, and then proceed to substitute their own idea of what is adventurous and funny, can do their children a real injury. Not only are they refusing natural instincts their natural food, but they run the risk of turning the children permanently against the substitutes. The deprivation can result in nightmares and fantasies, the effects of which often long outlast their occasions. The aversion can also persist into adult life.

If, on the other hand, the child is allowed his comics and his bloods, the taste for them will pass with the stage of development which they express. What is more, teacher and parent can take advantage of that stage to introduce the child to work of better quality which still lies within that stage's range of appreciation.

If then we make it our rule to give children, at any rate for a start, the sort of poems they are likely to enjoy — and it must be our first rule, if we are to lay the foundations of a good taste sincerely founded on enjoyment — our first question must be : What stage are they at ?

Suppose that Class No. I is very young ? What do young children like ?

First, of all, they like a jingle. They like a strongly-marked rhythm. Left to themselves, they will beat time rigidly, not caring whether they make the beat fall on a syllable which ought not to be accented. If 'of' or 'and' or 'the' or 'a' comes where they want to make the beat, bang goes the accent down on 'of' or 'and' or 'the' or 'a'. They love fine-sounding words, and don't care about the meaning. They love rhymes. They love speed. They love noise.

It is not hard to find verses which will satisfy these requirements. I commend *Speech Rhymes*, by Clive Sansom (A. and C. Black : three books), to the teacher who has not met them. They are a storehouse of material for very young children, and, chosen by a poet who can speak

verse well, they lead naturally to higher stages as the child grows older.

One very important thing — the teacher must at no stage be afraid of noise. It both delights and helps children (and adults) to join in and mark the rhythm by tapping with their feet, with a pencil, or whatever comes handy. Anyone who heard the American poet Vachel Lindsay invite his audience to collaborate in a recital does not need to be told how exciting the result was. For children, this sort of release is most valuable.

At the next stage of development, the child begins to demand some sense from the poem. Mere word jingles will no longer hold him. This is the time for poems that tell a story, for ballads, for character sketches on broad lines; poems about animals, trains, and any object or person naturally interesting to a child.

The whole secret is to choose a subject in which a child is interested. The poem must deal with something the child cares about, and in a way which he can understand. Then the fact that it is in verse will be no hindrance to his appreciation. On the contrary, it will be a help.

Here is a point on which teachers and many other adults go wrong. The rhythm and music of a poem and its other differences from ordinary speech give it what effect it has because they appeal to more than the conscious intelligence. The appeal is to the whole person, to the subconscious as well as to the conscious mind, to the emotions as well as to the judgment. We defeat the appeal, very often, by attempting to filter a poem through our brain line by line. We analyse the parts before we have given ourselves a chance to apprehend, much less to comprehend, the whole.

We do not make this mistake when listening to music. At a symphony concert we do not ask ourselves "Now what does he mean by that entry of the oboe?" or "What is the exact significance of that ascending figure for the 'cellos?" We wait until we have heard the entire work,

and keep all attempt at intellectual analysis to the end.

But because the medium of poetry is words, and words are or appear to be the labels of things and relationships in the everyday world, we are apt to be startled by them into an immediate and wholly premature attempt to extract their meaning, with little or no reference to their context. If the word 'drill' has an immediate significance for me because I have just been to my dentist, I am apt to be diverted from the current of any poem in which the word occurs to a sharp recollection of my recent sufferings. This is an extreme example, but the principle holds good, to a far greater extent than we realise, for all manner of words to which our personal life has already given pleasant or painful associations. Every critic knows the danger of over-praising work which contains the names of places which mean much to him. He may all too readily see what the names imply to him, without stopping to consider how much of the magic is due to the poet's skill.

So we adults, in the classroom and outside, can forget that upon the unspoiled mind of a child the effect of a poem is primitive and total — and this in spite of the fact that the child, even more than the adult, grasps at a reference to what he knows or thinks he knows. (Very often he takes the whole thing up wrong.) He is accessible to the full primitive powers of music and rhythm and incantation. The poem which hits us between the eyes hits him full in the solar plexus. (Of course, if we are sensitive readers of poetry, if we approach it in the right way and allow it to make its natural effect on us, it hits us there too.) And, because its effect is on his emotions, because all of him is involved, he needs to be handled very carefully indeed if he is to escape injury, and so be made to dislike the medium (poetry) in connection with which the injury occurred.

Remember, the object at this and every stage is to keep and develop the child's liking for the music of words. Explanations and annotations do not matter. A child's

misconception may be of much greater value to him than the explanation which destroys it. I have heard more than once a heartfelt cry, "Oh sir, *please* don't explain it!" which showed that imagination had been bruised already by the smashing of a cherished mental picture. Only a pedant will, in such instances, value accuracy above the magic which some word or phrase is exercising on a young imagination.

At every point the conscientious teacher should say to himself or herself, "Hitherto we have failed. Boys and girls leave school indifferent to poetry. Is what I want to do going to preserve and foster their natural power to like it? Or am I running any risk of harming that power?"

A child learns and feels and thinks as a child, and what he is to learn must be presented to him in his own terms. This never implies 'talking down'. 'Talking down' is an adult's idea of a child's terms: a very different thing.

All things being equal, boys and girls at this second stage of growth will begin to show a slight cleavage of interest, the boys favouring a more robust and adventurous type of narrative. The teacher will know what the class likes, and look for poems which express its interests. On the whole, I have found, in the course of giving recitals of verse at schools of very many kinds, that the difference in interest between the sexes is less than I should have expected.

Where it does occur, the girls are ready (but not eager) to be interested in a love *motif*, and the boys are hostile. *Lord Ullin's Daughter* (not that I recommend it) greatly interested a large class of girls aged 10-12 at a city elementary school. The boys thought it soppy, and refused to respond to the excitement of the chase in it — the point at which the teacher had hoped to catch their attention — because they were not interested in the persons or the problem involved.

The question most often asked by teachers who have had some experience is what they are to do with the hard

cases : for example, with boys of the age when they fancy themselves tough and are easily put off the whole idea of poetry. If one has to face a class of forty or fifty boys of 10-12 or more, what is one to do ?

The first thing is to build on what is there already. Get out of your mind the word 'poetry'. (It can be a question-begging word at any time.) Be content with verse. These boys are all capable of responding to words with a marked rhythm, on a subject which attracts them, provided they are given the fun of saying the words and joining in the resultant noise. Very well : start from there. Get hold of verses which fill the bill, and encourage the class to say them together.

For example, many of these boys will be at the blood-thirsty stage. Turn to the Golden Treasury, and give them Peacock's *Dinas Vawr*. Let them say it, with all the ferocity they can manage. The pleasure of saying together words which stimulate and excite them is a thing you can count on absolutely.

Next, try Kipling's *Smuggler's Song*. Also, if you can manage your voice, read them *A Truthful Song*, which comes before *The Wrong Thing* in *Rewards and Fairies*. These, with the queries happily dramatised, delight small boys. Also, if you can do it, read them *Danny Deeever*. Never mind whether you approve of it or not. You are trying to find something they will approve of.

Still keeping to subjects which will hold them, you can pass on to John Davidson's poem *The Train*. (Spender's *The Express*, Auden's *Night Mail*, and Tessimond's onomatopaeic *Dance of the Machines* will follow up this line of interest, but are for a later stage of development.)

Then, to encourage them to take single lines by themselves, get them to say *Widdicombe Fair*, and give each name in the refrain to a single speaker, allowing him to dramatise it as much as possible. This will teach them to come in each on his cue.

W. S. Gilbert will offer you all kinds of chances. When

you have got a mob of small boys proclaiming ecstatically

O I love the jolly rattle
Of an ordeal by battle . . .

or chanting the fortunes of Captain Reece, commanding the *Mantelpiece*, you will realise what marvellous material you have to work on. Are these things poetry? No. Fun. Enthusiasm. Enjoyment. Delight in the rhythm of words. And with every ten minutes you are scotching the growth of that prejudice against verse which is all too apt to rise and take hold at this stage of growth. Get them over the difficult age, in their own terms, and you will have no trouble later on. I have done it, and seen it done : I know what I am talking about. Never mind about what you think they ought to like. What do they like? Find out, and start from there.

Vachel Lindsay will give you a great deal for the classroom. Start with *The Potatoes Dance*. Many of the lines are repeated. Give some of the repetitions to different children, and, once they know where to come in, see how fast the class can say the poem. Then pass on to the *Congo* poem, and any others that take your fancy.

The choral speaking of verse can be an immense aid to appreciation and do all concerned a deal of good. There is no space here to do more than mention it, and commend those interested to an admirable anthology of suitable poems, *The Poet Speaks* (Gullan and Sansom).

You will have noticed that I am putting all the stress on saying verse aloud. Poetry is meant to be heard : and / the foremost part of the teacher's equipment is to be able to speak verse in such a way as to give pleasure to those who hear. Some people who love poetry can't speak it for toffee. Many poets can't speak their own verse — though they can give invaluable hints to anyone else who tries to speak it. Yet verse-speaking can be learned by anyone whose voice is not badly defective and who is prepared to take a bit of trouble. Some trouble is needed,

however musical the voice and sympathetic the intelligence ; but it is trouble a hundredfold repaid.

The great points about reading verse to a class are that many children cannot hear the poem when they see it in print : that when it is read the teacher need say nothing at all about who wrote it, and so leave it to make its own impact on the class : that no comment is called for, and each child can have his or her own experience of the poem privately, for good or bad : and — very important — the child can be detached from the whole proceedings, and so runs much less risk of embarrassment. Embarrassment must be avoided at any cost. The teacher must beware of an emotionally charged voice, a ' poetry voice ', of anything which may invite or justify derision. A lot is at stake. Be careful of it.

The choice of poems for the later stages will not be hard. There, you will have a positive interest to build upon. For those who are not sure where to begin, here is a recital programme which has been given to a number of schools, with results which it has been possible to check in many places :

Epitaph. Lascelles Abercrombie.

The Tinkers and The Old Woman. Joseph Campbell.

She Moved Through the Fair. Padraic Colum.

Sea Love. Charlotte Mew.

What Tomas an Buile said in a Pub, The Shell, No Pride Hath He
... James Stephens.

The Ballad of Father Gilligan, The Host of the Air, The Fisherman
(" Although I can see him still . . . "), *The Mountain Tomb,*
Sailing to Byzantium, An Acre of Grass. W. B. Yeats.

The Hill Wife, A Minor Bird, Fire and Ice, The Road Not Taken.
Robert Frost.

O What is that Sound . . . W. H. Auden.

Jig, Hornpipe. C. Day Lewis.

The Wife of Usher's Well, The Berkshire Tragedy. Anon.

When it is added that this programme was offered in each case, with a couple of prose interludes, to an unprepared

audience, with a minimum of explanation and comment, it will be seen that the teacher with abundant opportunities to pave the way can fly much higher.

You will notice that the poems chosen are ~~all~~ modern, except for the anonymous ballads. This is because children are more easily interested in the work of their own time. Its problems are theirs, and the way in which the problems are expressed belongs to them too. I am writing this after judging a verse-speaking competition at a school for girls. Two of the finalists, including the winner, chose poems of Sidney Keyes, and spoke them beautifully. Asked why they had chosen them, they made plain that the poems said what they themselves felt and would have wished to say, had they been able.

In my experience, the poetry of other times is best approached via our own, not the other way about.

The reader may be indignant with me for saying so many obvious things and appearing to presuppose perplexities which may not exist. I can only reply that everything here is in answer to a question from some teacher somewhere, and much is in answer to very many teachers all over the place. As things are, hundreds of people have to 'teach' poetry who feel that they have no special aptitude for the job. It is of them I am thinking, rather than the teacher who feels specially called on to do it — though he or she can sometimes do with a word of caution.

To sum up, then. Pick subjects which children like. If you must make them learn by heart, let them choose the poems. Do all you can by sound. Read, and let them read. Don't be afraid of noise. Fight to preserve and strengthen their liking for the rhythm and music of words. Keep explanation and annotation to a minimum. Put enjoyment first, second, third, and fourth. Never do violence to a child's feelings or sense of reticence. And be very, very, sparing of your own opinions.

II

DRAMA IN THE SCHOOL

By D. C. WHIMSTER

"Dramatic representation is at once the most alluring and intense form of literary experience for young adolescents."

The Teaching of English in England,
Board of Education Report, 1936

To many teachers, and to most other people, the mention of Drama in the School automatically recalls the school play. And this is naturally so, since it is the most publicised form of drama in the school, one that cuts across the natural division of forms and subjects, takes up a great deal of time and thought, and also reaches a section of the community which is not at all concerned with the internal affairs of the school. Yet unless the play arises naturally out of the teaching of drama in school hours, and is led up to by less formal acting in school and out, it may become a mere showing-off, a type of propaganda that wrests the work of the school away from the real function of education, and substitutes a flashy and cheap attitude for a right and enduring sense of values.

No one can doubt that acting is a natural and enthralling occupation for children. I remember once watching two ragged little girls who had obtained a length of white curtain. It became a bridal train, and for an hour they played at weddings, with a lovely grace and solemnity, quite oblivious of the passers-by. "Dramatic representation is at once the most alluring and intense form of literary experience for young adolescents." I should go even further than that, for the word 'literary' is too limiting, a relic of an attitude that could only justify the art of the theatre by reference to a kindred art. The theatre does not need such justification ; it is the most direct representa-

tion of life that is possible, and to a child more real than any novel or poem. Give a girl a doll, or a boy a sword and helmet, and they will need no further instruction from their elders. The greatest compliment they can pay to a story is, "Let's act it!"

The value of this powerful educational instrument has been recognised in many primary and junior schools, and the use of mime, the acting of nursery rhymes and dramatised poems, the re-telling of a story by action, are methods frequently practised. Yet only too often in its general education the secondary school throws away this legacy, and attempts to treat the pupil as if he were a limited and rather unintelligent adult. It has been said that in too many subjects the only way to do them with originality is to do them wrong. For most of the day the pupils are, or were, expected to sit at their desks, listening to lectures, writing in silence, or at the best answering carefully limiting questions in short limited sentences. A less natural life for a child or adolescent it is hard to imagine. Some freedom has been obtained, but it is partial and sporadic, and most teachers can tell from their experience how limited it is even now.

Of the subjects that can bring freedom, both of imagination and of bodily movement, into the classroom, drama is one of the greatest. As an illustration, let us take a term's work on a book of short modern plays, done by pupils of any age from 11 to 15. One period a week was allotted to it. The parts in each play were assigned by the master and posted up at the beginning of term on the notice-board. A stage committee of volunteers studied each play beforehand, and arranged two screens and simple properties at the start of the lesson. Boys who were keen studied or even learnt their parts, and since the plays were in an idiom easily understood there was little need for interruption of the acting. Ten minutes might remain after the performance to discuss the play or to repeat any part that had been particularly good, or bad. The few

costumes had to do duty for all sorts of characters, and in the same way the waste-paper basket might be a wash-tub one week and a barrel of apples the next, while the master's desk ranged from a bed or a council table to a hill or a city tower.

It will be seen that a period such as this gives scope for organised and controlled movement in the acting and stage-managing, for colour in costumes and properties, and for much inventiveness and imagination in actors and audience, to interpret the play, and to eke out the Elizabethan inadequacy of the setting. In addition, the whole form took part on a democratic basis, since the boys did most of the organising, and even when they were not in the play as actors they were liable to be called upon as 'crowd', 'noises off', or as substitutes for any absentees. The casting must remain the concern of the master: a boy gives the largest parts to the best actor, whereas the master is less concerned with the play and more with the educational needs of the individuals in his class.

This treatment is only applicable to modern one-act plays, of which there are up to a dozen good collections on the market. Longer plays, and those of past centuries, will probably need some introduction, and then can be taken in some such sequence as this: (*a*) prepared reading of the play, with the teacher, as the best prepared, taking the most difficult parts, and a short oral summary of each scene to ensure that the story is clear; (*b*) discussion of the plot, characters, scenery, and of the play as a whole; (*c*) detailed and meticulous study of the best scenes, as a preparation for (*d*) full-dress acting of the scenes chosen, perhaps with separate teams under their own producers. A weak form may need stages (*b*) and (*c*) adapted and tempered to suit them. All forms should end with acting the whole play or parts of it, or seeing them well acted. After taking a watch to pieces to look at the works, it is sheer wastefulness not to put it together and make sure that it will run again. And so with plays.

The method of discussing plays should be carefully handled. The characters should be referred to either as if they were real people (*e.g.* What was Lady Macbeth thinking when she awaited her husband after the murder of Duncan?), or from the producer's or actor's point of view (*e.g.* What kind of exit should Shylock make from the stage after the Trial scene?); never as the coiners of well-known quotations or material for contexts or grammar questions. Yet interest in the subject matter, aroused by the prospect of acting the play, brings automatically the more formal English in its wake. "What exactly does it mean?" leads directly to paraphrase, grammar, dictionary work, and research of all kinds, just as "What is it all about?" leads to précis, summaries of plot and character, and a study of the play as a whole. The further question, "How does the author do it?" with investigation of technique, of verse-forms, of figures of speech, is the reward of the good teacher and is to be hoped for but not confidently awaited.

The study of drama in school thus leads naturally to formal English. Far more importantly in the general education of the child, it leads naturally to discussions on how people behave and the influence of reason and emotion on action; that is, to a study of life. A widening of sympathy and understanding should develop from seeing the part played by the other sex, by old men and women, and the differences between people of past ages and of the present. Drama can bring both history and geography to life, and can do as much as biology in helping towards a sane attitude to sex.

In all these contributions of drama to education the plays of Shakespeare stand pre-eminent. It is interesting to speculate how much the recent history of English education owes to Shakespeare. Supposing that Milton had been accepted as the writer who above all others deserved the closest study in schools, the School Certificate text *par excellence*, our progress towards enlightenment would have

been slower. For although the study of Shakespeare is only a small part of our curriculum, and has often been on the wrong lines, yet the influence of his essentially human, kindly, and understanding personality must have for many boys and girls shone through the dull methodical annotating of the formal teacher. As J. C. Stobart charitably said in *The Divine Spark*: "Perhaps it is even a charm added to *The Tempest* to think how quaint it is that anything so like a bright butterfly on a June border should have been pinned down in Mr. Verity's brown covers for laborious dissection fifty lines at a time". No one ever spoke like that about Milton or Wordsworth. With most of Shakespeare, as with Dr. Johnson's philosophic friend, cheerfulness keeps breaking in.

There is no more enthusiastic plea for the use of Shakespeare in schools than Caldwell Cook's account of his experiments, *The Play Way*, where he says: "One of the best ways of teaching English to boys is to base all their English studies on their acting of the plays of Shakespeare". He goes on to show that boys have a natural sympathy with Shakespeare's period and characters, and his own successful teaching proves his claim: "Under right guidance, I think a company of boys might well find that Shakespeare belongs more to them than to some of their learned elders". Caldwell Cook's experiments are now thirty years old, and in that interval our break with the past, both in language and in background of knowledge, has grown more complete. Yet in spite of this I think his words could still be proved true.

This does not of course mean that the plays can be introduced at random to boys and girls of any age. Some teachers boldly start Shakespeare with classes of 11 plus; but that is probably too early for the average teacher, and might spell disaster. The more cautious method is to start at 12 or 13, perhaps with Lamb's or Quiller-Couch's retelling of the stories as a preparation. A reasonable order of progression might be:

- 11 plus—Lamb or Quiller-Couch.
- 12 plus—*Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*.
- 13 plus—*Julius Caesar*, *Henry V*, *Macbeth*, *Richard II*.
- 14 plus—*Twelfth Night*, *Henry IV*, Parts I and II, *The Tempest*.
- 15 plus—*As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*.

Thereafter, in the Sixth, any plays that the boys wish for may be read ; and by then there should be a few enthusiasts who will be a fair indication to the teacher of what plays will suit the particular group of boys or girls. There should throughout the school be no rigid order and no strict canon of plays to be studied ; but fortunate is the school whose organisation and stocks of books can allow the latitude desirable in this matter.

In the Sixth Forms treatment of drama can be wider and more varied, and there is opportunity for connecting up the plays read and their authors and periods. A quick reading or informal acting of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Coriolanus*, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, provides an antidote for the meticulous School Certificate study of, say, *As You Like It*. Translations of Plautus and Terence can link with *The Comedy of Errors*, Greek tragedy with O'Neill's *Mourning becomes Electra*, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* with Dryden's *All for Love* and Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*. There may be time for deliberate historical study of drama, for contrasting the demands of the different types of stage, or for the isolated and exciting experiences that can be given by such diverse plays as *Dr. Faustus*, *The Doll's House*, and *Murder in the Cathedral*. The more plays that can be seen acted by good repertory companies, at this stage as at others throughout the school, the better.

Any drama-reading in school that is worth its salt will lead to an insistent demand for more of it outside school hours. The reading or acting of plays in school must be felt to be inadequate in both time and resources, and leads naturally to a more fully rehearsed and more formally presented acting out of school. Hence the form or house play society that waxes and wanes in many schools ; hence

too the play-reading clubs. Both emerge sooner or later in a demand for a full-dress school play.

What are the right motives for embarking upon so ambitious an undertaking? To keep up a tradition? To make money for the school, or for some charity? Or to advertise the school — or the producer? Such motives might be made less harmful by the tide of enthusiasm that the development of the production should create. Even then they should only be immediate causes; the ultimate cause, if the production is not to be offensive to a sensitive member of the audience, must be the genuine and natural love of drama in the school, fostered by right teaching in school hours.

The last temptation is the greatest treason,
To do the right deed for the wrong reason.

A school play, produced for the right reason, may achieve something greater than itself. It is, in many ways, the most complete expression of the corporate life of the school. There may be rivals for this position — Speech Day, an eisteddfod, a Training Corps inspection, a gymnastic display, an open day for parents with exhibitions of school work might be among them — but in many schools the play stands pre-eminent for the variety of contribution, the number of contributors, and the intensity of effort needed at the climax.

Its success or failure is often assured before rehearsals begin, for the producer's choice of a play to suit his material is all-important. For this he can shelter behind no one else; boys may come with recommendations of farces they have seen acted in the commercial theatre, or drawing-room comedies full of slick jokes and effective situations. Yet they cannot fully realise, as he can, the limitations of schoolboy actors and a school stage setting, nor have they his sense of responsibility. He need not trouble to play down to the audience, as they tend to do; school plays should be educational, and the lines worth learning, the

characters truly drawn, the situations effective when interpreted by amateurs. That is the trouble with the slick modern comedy that so attracts the cast. Boys who would make a competent and comely Viola or Olivia are gauche and gawky as a girl in modern costume. But even this is less awkward, in my experience, than a boy acting the modern man-about-town, where the disguise is insufficient to make him forget himself. A play like Ian Hay's *House-master* or Sherriff's *Badger's Green* can be very successful, since the boys in them behave like boys, and most of the men are middle-aged or old. Not so the Noel Coward type, which are to be avoided at all costs.

The boy who cannot cope with short skirts or handle a tea-cup may however do very well with a farthingale or a pouncet-box, which explains why the Elizabethan plays, and especially Shakespeare, are far the best as a staple diet for schools. It makes little difference whether the school is of boys, girls, or mixed. The plays were, after all, written for boys to play the heroine's part ; on the other hand, girls are suited by a period when masculine fashions were effeminate ; and doubly fortunate for all dramatic work is the mixed school, where dancing and duels, carpentry and costume-making, can all find their enthusiastic and practised exponents.

The standard of production aimed at is a matter of some difficulty to decide. The natural answer is, "The best possible." It is bad training for the cast to get used to shoddiness in setting, costume, or acting, or for the Messenger or the Second Murderer to get no training and feel that he does not matter ; and it is an axiom that amateurs never know their parts well enough and are always under-rehearsed. Yet there is something to be said on the other side : the staff and the pupils both have more important duties in teaching and learning, and those duties are all but full-time. And any attempt to rival a professional production in polish of acting or opulence of setting is doomed to failure, with the accompanying sense of dis-

appointment and frustration. There are schools with so high a standard of play-acting that for the actors all normal school work goes by the board for weeks before ; and from bitter experience many producers know that for most of a term they have no life of their own at all, and find it hard to do their ordinary teaching and correcting adequately. The answer lies partly in a compromise, partly in a subdivision of duties. The producer for instance should not have to help to make scenery, nor work out details of dresses. If the necessary help is not available, there should be either no play, or a short and simple one. Pupils entered for examinations should have minor parts or none at all if they are slow at learning. A less formal atmosphere or a reduced price at the performances would warn the audience to expect a utility production, of sound quality but inexpensive, and not the style of Drury Lane or His Majesty's. And an Elizabethan drama (without royalties to pay), produced before curtains with only simple properties, will be far more satisfying, to actors and audience alike, than an elaborately produced modern play which is often unconvincing in the end.

The subdivision of duties can apply to the boys as well as to the staff. School plays cannot claim to be a genuine school activity if they get into the hands of a clique. Choose a play, therefore, with a large cast and no overpowering single part in it. If auditions can be given to the whole school, and not just to those who did well in last year's play, so much the better, for no boy or girl is incapable of acting. For those who are not chosen, there are still innumerable jobs. Carpenters, electricians, costume and property makers, noises-off experts, business managers, orchestra, ushers, stage crowds, should include as many children as can be conveniently coped with, and should all get their share of responsibility, their share of training, and their share of credit.

With these general principles in mind, it might be worth while to go through a typical play production, the

performances to take place, say, in the middle of March. In the first few weeks of the autumn term the producer urges his play-reading society, or his stalwart actors, to think about possible plays, read them, and bring them to him for discussion. Meanwhile he re-examines the plays he knows, haunts the public library, and badgers his classical or modern languages colleagues or members of repertory companies. By the end of November he should be sure which play will best suit the resources at his disposal. Auditions of all possible actors, and two or three open readings before the end of term, will enable him to choose a problematical cast, and perhaps tell one or two of the near-certainties to start learning their parts.

The Christmas holidays give him a chance of further planning, in which a model of his stage with cut-out scenery and figures is a great help. One or two all-day rehearsals just before term begins would work wonders for the smooth running of the play. Stage managers and carpenters and costume makers will all do better if they can be clear about their duties before they are submerged in the work of the term.

Rehearsals in January and February must be many and short — one a week for the whole cast, perhaps, with two others for separate groups of characters. Meanwhile properties, even if only substitute ones, should be in use, and the scenery in process of making.

In rehearsals the producer will first have to be on the stage with the actors, advising, indicating positions, even illustrating actions to the best of his power. Books will soon be felt as an encumbrance, though it does not follow by any means that the actors will soon learn their parts, or know them with the utter thoroughness that is essential. Audibility can be helped, as soon as books are unnecessary, by various devices — a boy with a bell at the back of the hall, lessons in voice-production and breath-control, making characters practise audible whispering, putting two chief characters at opposite ends of the hall and making them

act to each other. Poor audibility is often a sign of nervousness, and will disappear as the actor gets to feel that he has mastered his part.

It is in the midst of these rehearsals that the cast sometimes loses its belief in the play. I once produced *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* in a school that had grown used to modern comedy. A month before the performance the cast came to me almost with tears in their eyes. "It's a hopeless play," they said, "even Shakespeare would be better than this." But when the orchestra began to have joint rehearsals and accompany the songs, when the teams of folk-dancers joined in and some of the fantastic and colourful costumes were ready, they began to see, what the producer can see from the start, the play as a whole, and there was no more depression. This incident was entirely my fault. The producer must take the cast into his confidence at the start, and try to give them an idea of what the finished production will be like. After that, he and they must live on faith for a while, and the faith must be strong enough to bear the strain. There is always a stage, late in the rehearsing of the play, when one knows whether that production is to be worth-while or not. It is the moment when the various teams first begin to realise fully that they are one and the same team, when they start to work together, instead of separately, towards the great climax of the performance. If this stage does not come, the chief value of the production is wasted, and usually through the fault of the producer. If it does come, something of immeasurable value has been achieved.

This purpose is helped by having a preliminary dress rehearsal about three weeks before the performance, which also gives the non-actors a greater sense of urgency. It should be with full lighting, partly to encourage the electricians, whom I have always found the most independent and least punctual members of the team, but chiefly because the wall of light that separates an actor from his audience takes some getting used to. The business man-

agers should by now have come out into the open, with advertising, however limited, ticket-selling, and detailed organisation of the hall.

For the last fortnight the actors, out of school hours, belong body and soul to the producer, and he is fortunate if he can keep his hair unruffled and his voice calm. By now he is taking rehearsals from the back of the hall, while stage manager and prompter control from the stage. Weak scenes will be rehearsed, and scenes with large numbers of actors or complicated actions. Generally the chief aims will be speed and smoothness — the repartee said quickly and clearly, the tempo varied to suit the emotional intensity of the scene, a general quickening-up of the action with full insistence on pauses for dramatic moments. The tenseness and restlessness that attack so many amateur actors must be carefully watched for. By now everyone should know his part and his character so well that he has no fears and little self-consciousness, and can relax and merge his own personality in that of the part.

I like to have two other dress rehearsals, one some days before the performance (a straight run-through to make sure of timing) and one full dress rehearsal the day before, with make-up, orchestra, and intervals of the right length. This one should be as good as it can be made — the tradition that a weak dress rehearsal means a successful first night is highly pernicious for school productions, as, I suspect, for any others — and should have an embryo audience, of senior boys perhaps, with full encouragement to laugh (preferably at the right places) and to applaud, but not to barrack. They can be guaranteed to give the cast some foretaste of what they may expect the following night, and so help them over the nervousness that sometimes afflicts the first night of a school play. Any official photographs can be taken before or after this rehearsal.

The performances need little comment. The producer can do no more, and if he is strong-minded will sit at the back of the hall. His presence at the intervals is advisable,

to distribute praise, and thus counteract the many adverse criticisms he has had to make in the weeks before. And there must be someone about the stage who can take charge in case something goes badly wrong. When the scenery collapses, the curtains stick, an actor feels ill, or an entrance is made five pages too early, school actors tend to behave like children who have lost their nurse — and their nurse is the producer. A resourceful and level-headed stage manager, a school prefect for instance, can do a great deal to allay panic, and it is far better training both for him and for the cast if he is left to cope with the emergency. But the producer should be within call.

On the last night of the play some celebration is called for ; it is best made the boys' affair, with supper, speeches, and songs, and the staff there as guests and not by right. It is, especially for the junior, a memorable occasion.

Another good and useful reward is the granting of a half-holiday from school work to all who took any part in the play, on the stage or off. They come to school, are allotted clearing-up jobs, and get away early enough to have a pleasant feeling of superior freedom over those who are working in school. The stalwarts who bore the burden of preparation of the play will probably be still hard at it long after school is over — but then they like it, and ask for no sympathy. The result is a clear stage and property-room, with everything in order for the next play.

Such a scheme of production is not idealistic ; yet it is evident that in many schools even this standard is impossible. The school where the stage is put up in the gymnasium a day before the performance, or where a hall must be hired, is obviously handicapped. Even in such a moderate demand as that scenery and properties should be ready a few weeks in advance, good resolution often outruns performance. The standard must be adapted to circumstances, and general goodwill and efficiency will be needed to attain it.

The value of the school play to the school has already

been discussed ; what of its value to the individual actor ? There are obvious merits : training in understanding and sensitiveness, in clear speech, in self-discipline and co-operation, in working punctually and efficiently towards a clearly defined climax. There is, however, a real danger, that of selfishness and exhibitionism. The successful boy actor of Hamlet or Abraham Lincoln or Androcles tends for a few weeks to be objectionably conceited, particularly if, as often happens, he is a boy who has not shone in other sides of school life. Yet he deserves his reward for weeks of hard work, and a school is not a place where conceit easily flourishes for long.

An allied danger lies in the choice of a boy for a particular role. The boy chosen for Sir Andrew Aguecheek tends in real life to be affected and lisping, Sir Toby to be boisterous and bullying, Orsino to be a languid dilet-tante, and the feminine leads to be already effeminate and too conscious of their good looks. In these extreme cases the producer's sense of moral responsibility towards the individual must overrule his desire for a brilliant performance. I have known school producers strong-minded enough to cast by opposites, training the languid Orsino-like character to make an excellently padded and roistering Sir Toby. Yet it is rare for any real harm to be done, and time cures most of it. The 14-year-old page with the pleasant singing voice makes all the mothers in the audience sentimental ; at 15 he is a most attractive heroine, praised in the local press and in danger of being badly spoilt. But by 16 his hands and feet are several sizes too large, though his frank look and clear speech still make him acceptable as the hero. Before he leaves the school, with his voice deeper and his figure broader, he may find himself cast for Macbeth, Bottom, Lady Brocklehurst, or Mrs. Malaprop, or even relegated to First Lord, First Murderer — or stage manager. A training in mastering disappointment is not the least of the lessons taught by the school play ; and it is the producer's privilege to help in the

gentle administration of this type of character-training, as of so many others.

Enough has been said to show the important place that drama can take, both in and out of school, to the community as well as to the individual pupil. It is admirably summed up in the restrained words of the Board of Education's *Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers* : " Drama in the school may perhaps be appropriately defined as a training, a study, and an art. It is an excellent discipline in speech, poise and self-confidence. It affords remarkable opportunities for active literary study ; and it is a natural and effective mode of artistic expression for children."

III

CHORAL SPEAKING

By A. S. T. FISHER

AGAINST the many patent blessings which the discovery of printing bestowed upon the world there should be set one serious disadvantage that has not been sufficiently recognised : it made poetry the concern of the eye instead of the ear. Poetry was more widely read, but less often uttered. Books took the place of bards. Instead of listening to a poet, as they still listened to Chaucer, men scanned a page. Poets began, like Sir Benjamin Backbite, to envisage their elegies "on a beautiful quarto page, where a neat rivulet of text shall meander through a meadow of margin".

One of the reasons why the lyric, after the Elizabethans, suffered a decline may be found in this process by which the sense of a poem became exalted at the expense of its sound. The sense of many of the Elizabethan lyrics is trivial or commonplace :

Come unto these yellow sands,
And then take hands :
Curtsied when you have and kissed
The wild waves whist,
Foot it featly here and there ;
And, sweet sprites, the burthen bear.
Hark, hark !
Bow-wow.
The watch-dogs bark :
Bow-wow.
Hark, hark ! I hear
The strain of strutting chanticleer
Cry, Cock-a-didle-dow.

This is excellent music, but poor metaphysic, and the influence of the printed word combined with other tendencies

to bring metaphysical poetry into fashion and, later, to develop the heavy gait of the heroic verse and the dead conventional diction of the bulk of the classical poetry of the eighteenth century. Milton could still say,

I was all ear,
And took in strains that might create a soul
Under the ribs of Death.

But his imitators missed the music and their verses remain dry bones, dry as those of Ezekiel's vision. Much of the neglect of Milton's poetry must be due to the fact that it is so seldom *heard*, and it was with quite a shock of pleasure that spectators of the recent Sadlers Wells ballet, *Comus*, heard Robert Helpmann break into speech with the lines

The star that bids the shepherd fold,
Now the top of heaven doth hold ;
And the gilded car of day
His glowing axle doth allay
In the steep Atlantic stream. . . .

It is not often that we hear poetry from the stage and this, in view of the great tradition founded by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, is astonishing and regrettable, but it is due to a tendency towards increasing realism, in the mistaken desire "to hold the mirror up to nature". This was interpreted in the literal instead of the spiritual sense. The stage was withdrawn from the audience and framed in the proscenium arch, so that the drama was seen as a picture, remote from everyday life and no longer an intensification of it. At the same time colloquial speech was adopted in place of verse, and playwrights were no longer necessarily poets, or actors necessarily elocutionists, to our great loss.

Thus the musical language of Shakespeare and Milton and Herrick and Sir Thomas Browne was seldom heard in public and even more rarely composed. Fortunately the Authorized Version of the Bible continued to be read in the churches and at family prayers, and here and there a poet like Gray, Collins, or Chatterton achieved a *moment*

musical, or, like Pope, composed some exquisite chamber music, but it was not until the time of Tennyson and Edward Lear, who were close friends, that we find any deep concern for the sound of words in poetry. An analysis of such a poem as *The Lotos-Eaters* will reveal how carefully Tennyson composed, his love of liquid consonants and long vowels, his use of assonance :

All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone :
Thro' every hollow cave and alley lone,
Round and round the spicy downs the yellow Lotos-dust is blown.

It was Lear, however, who most clearly revealed the importance of the sound of words, just because he was concerned not with sense, but nonsense.

And all night long they sailed away ;
And when the sun went down,
They whistled and warbled a moony song
To the echoing sound of a coppery gong,
In the shade of the mountains brown.

" O Timballo ! How happy we are,
When we live in a sieve and a crockery-jar,
And all night long in the moonlight pale,
We sail away with a pea-green sail,
In the shade of the mountains brown ! "

We are only just discovering that this is fine poetry.

For a new delight in the music of poetry is a phenomenon of our time, accompanied by a similar pleasure in pure music. The causes of this renaissance are probably as obscure and diverse as those of any other renaissance. It is enough for the present purpose to notice the helpful medium of Broadcasting, the pioneer work of men like W. B. Yeats, Gordon Bottomley, T. S. Eliot, and W. H. Auden in bringing back poetry to the stage, and the influence of the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins upon contemporary poets, working towards the adoption of freer and subtler rhythms, internal rhymes, assonance, and alliteration.

Now the best way to appreciate music is to attempt to make it oneself. Just as it is better to hear an orchestra play a symphony than to read the musical score of it, and best, perhaps, to take a part in the orchestra oneself, so it is better to hear a poem well read than to see it in a book, and best to say it aloud oneself — or with others. Choral speaking has, in fact, been shown by experience to be one of the high-roads to the Appreciation of Poetry. There is, first, the peculiar satisfaction that is always felt in communal effort, the working together of a team to achieve a harmonious effect, whether the purpose be to score a goal, produce a play, or perform an overture. Secondly, there is the merit that any active interpretation of an art demands a degree of co-operation between performer and maker. The soloist in a concerto cannot achieve a first-rate execution of his part without some understanding of the composer's purpose and a sympathy with his mood. The co-operation must be both intellectual and emotional.

It is interesting to watch this process working in a school dramatic society, where many of the actors approach their first Shakespearian production almost with hostility and are slowly but surely captivated as rehearsals proceed *and the language is absorbed. Commentaries are searched for light upon difficult passages and the producer's suggestions sometimes firmly refused.* If he is wise he will rejoice and retract, knowing that the greater part of his purpose is achieved. Similarly, in verse-speaking choirs, questions such as "How should this be said?" arise naturally during the practices and lead to discussions and decisions about the meaning, rhythm, and stresses of the poem. Understanding of the author's purpose and sympathy with his mood are sought for as a matter of course because they will help to settle questions of inflexions and pitch. This is surely better than forcing a pupil to ferret out the meaning of a poem under the threat that he may have to paraphrase it in an examination, which is the customary approach to poetry in the middle and upper

forms of secondary schools. The need to appreciate arises from within and is not imposed from outside, and English, as is right for English children, is absorbed, not taught.

"Notice the love of Nature in line 5 and the alliteration in line 8," our Fifth Form master would say, and we would dutifully make the necessary notes. This, combined with the setting of a fixed number of lines to be learnt by heart for an evening's prep., was how we 'did' poetry, and, of course, nearly 'did for' it, too, except for those with a particularly imaginative ear. Our English masters might have taken Keats' famous rhapsody upon a visual image as their motto :

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter ; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on ;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone.

The sensual ear, indeed ! Encouragement of any such thing was highly dangerous and quite out of the question. So the boys would be forced to learn another dozen lines of *Horatius* and the girls a further slab of Shelley's *Skylark*. Neither poem, as it happens, can stand the searching test of utterance.

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit !
Bird thou never wert. . . .

That second line must be one of the most cacophonous ever written in any language. If it can be matched it is by the second of these lines from *Horatius* :

And even the ranks of Tuscany
Could scarce forbear to cheer.

I do not want to suggest that all good poetry or even that which is particularly euphonious can be successfully used for choral speaking. The greater part of it is the expression of emotions too intimate or too individual to be treated chorally. Love poetry is an obvious example, and the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins are peculiarly dis-

appointing from this point of view ; they must be spoken, but almost always by a single speaker, because of the unique personal flavour. We must therefore look for suitable material first in the impersonal and universal utterances of the folk, such as nursery rhymes, ballads, psalms and folk-songs, poetry shaped by the lips of thousands through many generations, forms as simple and final as those sea-sculptured stones that Paul Nash delights to put into his pictures.

Girls and Boys come out to Play, Oranges and Lemons, The Grand Old Duke of York, London Bridge, Old King Cole, I had a little Nut Tree—these have always formed the repertoire of the nursery chorus. To adapt the words of Sir Thomas Browne, there is something in them of Divinity more than the ear discovers . . . they are a sensible fit of that Harmony which intellectually sounds in the ears of God—

To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring.

As the children have made their own verses for Choral Speaking they ought to be allowed to say them, and these are the best that can be found for beginners. Many of the rhymes have appropriate traditional actions and small people will be happier if they can perform these instead of sitting or standing still. Such an action piece may be sandwiched between two poems without action, or the children may be encouraged to make up their own 'business' to suit the words. Here is an example of a less familiar nursery rhyme of the action type :

Old Roger is dead and gone to his grave,
H'm, ha ! gone to his grave.
They planted an apple tree over his head,
H'm, ha ! over his head.
The apples grew ripe and ready to drop,
H'm, ha ! ready to drop.
There came a high wind and blew them all off,
H'm, ha ! blew them all off.

There came an old woman to pick them all up,
H'm, ha ! pick them all up.
 Old Roger got up and gave her a knock,
H'm, ha ! gave her a knock,
 Which made the old woman go hipperty hop,
H'm, ha ! hipperty hop.

The words may be spoken by the whole class or the narrative lines may be reserved for a single speaker or small group. The action of 'Old Roger' is that the children join hands to make a ring, and one lies down in the middle with a handkerchief over his head, to represent old Roger. At the second verse a child goes from the ring to stand by the body, to represent the tree, and at the fifth verse another comes and pretends to pick up apples. Then Roger jumps up and beats the 'old woman' out of the ring. Many of these old rhymes are based upon ancient superstitions, and here it is worth explaining that trees were once held in awe as the homes of spirits, that the spirit of a dead man naturally took possession of a tree planted above his corpse, and that he would protect the fruit from robbers because this would give the thief power over him. No doubt the old woman was a witch. As in the case of nearly all traditional rhymes there are many variations of the words, and instead of H'm-ha the chorus can choose Hi-hi, He-hi, Hey-hi, Heigh-ho, He-haw, or make up a noise of their own. There are even traditional tunes to the words¹ (for the old folk-poetry was generally chanted), and where these are well known it is quite a good plan with beginners to mix a little choral singing with the choral speaking.

Older children, who have grown out of what they regard as nursery fare, may prefer to start with a folk-song like *Green grow the Rushes O*, or with some of the ballads, such as *Sir Patrick Spens*, *Lord Randal*, or *Binnorie*, but even nursery rhymes are tolerated if they are introduced with

¹ See Mrs. Gomme's *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. Poem and tune are to be found in the author's anthology, *Voice and Verse*, C.U.P.

sufficient enthusiasm, and their antiquity and interest explained ; their strongly marked rhythms provide excellent practice for unison speaking. For the class must get used to speaking as one voice and the customary difficulties have first to be resolved. There are those who drag behind and those who like to be half a word ahead, and the one who puts in too much expression and the many who fall into a monotonous drone such as they once used to learn their multiplication tables. It is not easy to train them all to listen to the communal voice as an instrumentalist listens to the orchestra in which he is playing.

When the class is tolerably efficient in unison speaking, keeping together though varying the pace, instinctively raising the pitch a little as this increases and dropping it as the pace slows, and achieving effects of crescendo and diminuendo smoothly, then some differentiation should be made and the class divided into 'light' and 'heavy' voices. These two groups will normally act as semi-choruses. The conductor should also be able to call on small groups of both extremes for special passages, working with the bulk of the class (of medium voices) as main chorus. He should also select certain individuals with particular qualities of voice whom he can call upon for any solo passages.

Let us suppose that the class is going to perform *Lord Randal*. Each verse is of the same pattern :

" O where hae ye been, Lord Randal, my son ?

O where hae ye been, my handsome young man ? "

" I hae been to the wild wood ; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary wi' hunting and fain would lie down."

For this the class should be divided into semi-choruses, the lighter voices speaking for the mother and the heavier voices for Lord Randal. In schools south of the Border decisions will have to be made on how far to follow the Scots dialect, and any expert present must advise on the exact pronunciation of such words as ' hae '.

The ballad *Binnorie* is not quite so simple :

There were twa sisters sat in a bower ;
Binnorie, O Binnorie !
 There cam a knight to be their wooer,
By the bonnie milldams o' Binnorie.

The second and fourth lines, which run as the refrain throughout the ballad, should be spoken by the whole class ; a smaller middle group can take the narrative lines, and individuals speak for the two sisters, the miller's son, and the harp. ' *Binnorie* ' should be pronounced so as to rhyme with ' story '. The chorus must take care to avoid monotony as the tale proceeds ; their lines should provide, by their tone, a subtle commentary upon the verses.

Part of the interest of Choral Speaking lies in the fact that one poem may be spoken in many different ways, each giving a distinctive emphasis. Thus, in the case of the ballad *Sir Patrick Spens*, one of the most successful methods, with children up to 13 years of age, is to have a few members of the class miming the action while the rest recite the ballad in chorus. It will be enough to remind the reader of the first three verses to show how the words are particularly suited to mime.

The king sits in Dunfermline town
 Drinking the blude-red wine ;
 " O whare will I get a skeely skipper
 To sail this new ship o' mine ? "

O up and spak an eldern knight,
 Sat at the king's right knee :
 " Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor
 That ever sailed the sea."

Our king has written a braid letter,
 And sealed it with *his* hand,
 And sent it to Sir Patrick Spens,
 Was walking on the strand.

An obvious alternative treatment is to allot the narrative

lines to the main chorus and the words of the king, the eldern knight, Sir Patrick, and the sailor to individual speakers.

These examples will be enough, perhaps, to show the kind of procedure involved in the teaching of choral speaking. One of the main difficulties has hitherto been that so few of the poems in the usual school anthologies are suitable for choral treatment, but the increasing demand is inevitably evoking the necessary supply and two or three verse-speaking anthologies are already available. Some suggestions of suitable material, however, in addition to folk rhymes and ballads, may be welcome.

The nonsense songs of Edward Lear, to which I have already referred, are always popular, as are also the similar verses of Lewis Carroll and one or two of the patter songs of W. S. Gilbert. Much easily accessible material can be found in the Bible, notably in the Psalms, the book of Job, and the second half of Isaiah. The Christmas story can easily be arranged for a narrative group, chorus of angels, trio of Wise Men, and solo voices representing Gabriel and Mary ; such an arrangement is generally more effective than any nativity play. Narrative pieces, like *The Jackdaw of Rheims*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, and *High Tide on the Lincolnshire Coast*, make an immediate appeal ; the first two can be arranged for quite an extensive cast. Most of the songs from Shakespeare's plays are delightful when said chorally, though they require expert utterance. It is a rare experience to hear *Full Fathom Five* spoken by a good choir ; no single voice can rival the richness of tone and expression. Many of Tennyson's poems are particularly suitable, as I have already suggested, and, by way of contrast, there are the poems of the American negro poet, Vachel Lindsay, which were specially written for choirs, full directions being supplied by the author himself. The best of these are *The Congo* and *The Daniel Jazz*. Some of the poems of Edith Sitwell are excellent for choral speaking. These few suggestions must serve to show the nature and

range of poetry which can be tackled by choirs of moderate experience and of ages up to 14.

It is with more advanced work that the chief difficulties arise. Here we meet once again the boggy of the School Certificate Examination. You cannot, as yet, enter a class for a test in Choral Speaking, and the exigencies of the normal syllabus leave little time for extraneous studies. This loss is the more serious because of the wealth of great poetry that could otherwise be used. As well as some of the works of the old masters, such as *Comus* and *Samson Agonistes*, there is much important recent and contemporary poetry that is admirably adapted to choral speaking, indeed, demands such treatment. Examples are Yeats' *Easter, 1916*, T. S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*, and the choruses from his verse plays and those of W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. Here is great speech which gives articulate expression to the desires and diseases of the world of our time, but there is no room for it inside the time-table. Well then, we must find room outside it. Why not take the opportunity of giving a display on the school Speech Day and so allow the occasion a rare chance to live up to its name?

Furthermore, most secondary schools have some sort of Literary and Debating Society or Arts Club. An occasional meeting of such a body might well be set aside for choral speaking, and, though polished performances can scarcely be expected, members will gain more pleasure and profit than from many of the usual 'poetry evenings', particularly if a liberal allowance on the programme is given to contemporary works. It is a fact that young people will find no difficulty in understanding new poetry that baffles an elder generation, and the middle-aged teacher will often observe with amazement that they are stimulated and nourished by what appears to him to be the merest clap-trap or utter stuff and nonsense.

Mr. W. H. Auden has recently insisted that the best definition of poetry is "memorable speech". This is brief

enough to be witty, but broad enough to be true. We naturally proceed, however, to enquire what are the qualities of a piece of speech that make it memorable. It is partly the meaning of the words, but, as we have seen, this is not always important ; it must therefore chiefly depend upon the sound of the words themselves and the way they are put together, which correspond to the fundamental qualities of melody and rhythm in music. A man may have something of profound significance to say to the world, but unless he says it well, in poetry, it will not be remembered. Ask half a dozen people to tell the story of Jack the Giant-killer and you will get six very different versions of the story. Only in one point will they all agree, the words

Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman !

Probably most of them will remember the next two lines as well :

Be he alive, or be he dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread !

The rest of the story is prose ; only the memorable part is poetry, and not until the words are actually rolling off the tongue is their full flavour appreciated, their full meaning absorbed. The sound is part of the meaning, as Milton knew when he said that the voice was able "to pierce dead things with inbreathed sense". What are those famous lines of his, indeed, but an inspired paean in praise of Choral Speaking ?

Blest pair of sirens, pledges of Heaven's joy,
Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,
Wed your divine sounds, and mixed power employ,
Dead things with inbreathed sense able to pierce ;
And to our high-raised phantasy present
That undisturbèd song of pure concent
Aye sung before the sapphire-coloured throne
To him that sits thereon,
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee ;

Where the bright seraphim in burning row
Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow ;
And the cherubic host in thousand quires
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires. . . .

No, it won't do ! You will have to read that again, aloud.

IV

SPOKEN ENGLISH IN THE SCHOOL

By M. M. LEWIS

(i)

THIS is the day of the spoken word. The coming of the speech machines — telephone, gramophone, radio, talkie — has meant an increase in the power and functions of speech throughout the world. In this development special circumstances combine to give English speech a special place in English education. English is now more widely spoken than any other tongue, and the recognition of Basic English as the official auxiliary language of the British Commonwealth promises it an even greater dominance in the future. In our own country the extension of school life by the new Education Act brings the opportunity of a fuller education in speech, and with it a corresponding responsibility of the school to see that this opportunity is well used.

What may we expect by way of speech education for boys and girls leaving school at 15 or 16? Some education, no doubt, in speech as the art of interpreting prose, verse, and the drama. Certainly no education is complete which does not make full provision for the practice and appreciation of this interpretative art. In this book its varied aspects are dealt with in Chapters I, II, and VI.

But here we are concerned with something if not more important then certainly more fundamental: what must always be the foundation of everything else in education — speech as a means of communication. By communication we mean the expression of thought and feeling with the intention of evoking thought and feeling in a listener. Broadly speaking, there are two main functions of speech as a means of social communication, two functions which

commonly work together but which we must clearly distinguish if we are to make sure of giving children a complete education in speech. First of all we use speech as a means of causing others to act : we instruct, command, persuade. Or we use speech as a means of causing others to think or feel, but without the immediate intention that thought or feeling shall determine action. Both functions, already evident in the very beginnings of speech in infancy, remain the motive forces of speech as communication throughout social life. For convenience we may name them the manipulative and declarative functions of speech.

We see the young child using speech manipulatively when he says *mama* as a means of causing his mother to do something for him. He says *mama*, stretching out for a toy that has dropped beyond his reach, and she hands it to him. He is causing her to do something for him, to manipulate what in his environment still lies beyond his reach or is beyond his immature skill. The young child uses speech declaratively when lying in his cot he points to a brightly-coloured ball dangling above him and gleefully cries *mama* ! He is asking nothing more of his mother than that she shall also look at the ball and share his own pleasure in it. He is not asking her to do anything with the ball ; it is enough if his cry evokes an answering smile.

The use of speech manipulatively throughout life needs no further illustration ; it enters into all the spoken instructions that form so constant a feature of our everyday life, from the whisper that flashes along the radio-telephone to the submarine in remote waters, to the blare of the loud-speaker at the railway station. But the declarative use of speech needs perhaps a further word. There is an old *Punch* joke. Two ladies in Hyde Park are talking about a young man and woman sitting together on a distant seat. FIRST LADY : " Yes, *he* was a Senior Wrangler and *she* has just come down from Girton." SECOND LADY : " How very interesting ! What clever things they must

be talking about ! ” And now close-up. HE : “ Darling ! ” SHE : “ Yes, darling ? ” HE : “ Nothing, darling ; only *darling*, darling ! ” This, if it is anything at all, is surely declarative.

We use speech declaratively every day when we say “ Good morning ” or “ How do you do ? ” merely as a means of getting into touch with the other person. The state of the weather or his health is hardly our real concern. A well-known definition of a bore is a man who when you ask him how he is — tells you. At the other extreme, language is used declaratively in the work of the poet, the dramatist, or the novelist : language as the medium of communion in a common experience.

Speech is commonly both manipulative and declarative ; hoping to influence the other person’s actions we do what we can to put him in the right frame of mind. Complete education in speech as a means of communication is therefore the art of speaking clearly, expressively, and effectively, throughout the whole range of utterance, from everyday conversation to the most formal address. With it there must go education in the correlative art of listening. Here then is our programme ; how are we to carry it out ?

(ii)

The first concern of speech education in school is so obvious that perhaps we sometimes take it for granted ; the art of ordinary conversation. But it is very far from true that the ordinary boy or girl picks up at home or in the playground even the rudiments of how to get in touch with the other person and interchange ideas. It is characteristic of our democracy that we lack a tradition of easy intercourse among its members. But it is a lack to which we are no longer indifferent. Even the Norwood Committee felt constrained to hope for “ such practice and facility in expressing thoughts aloud in the presence of others as will lead to some degree of confidence and at

least the appearance of ease of manner". Could this be irony?

Beyond everyday conversation the school must be concerned with the more directly intentional forms of speech: the giving of instructions; skill in narration and description — for it may happen to anyone to have to give an account of what he has witnessed; skill in the exposition of a process; skill in the exposition of ideas — the clear and coherent communication of what is in one's mind; and skill in argument, the art of convincing the other person.

Throughout all this there must run constant and continued training in the art of listening. To be a good listener, even in ordinary conversation; to understand instructions; to be able to listen discriminatively, critically, yet with sympathy and understanding to narrative, description, exposition, argument — these are some of the marks of an educated man. The growth of the power of the radio and the cinema makes this kind of education daily more urgent.

In all speech education the central responsibility must lie with the teacher. His own speech must be good; he must believe in what he is doing — that it really does matter to the ordinary man to speak well. The teacher must have some knowledge of the nature of speech — how it grows and how it functions; and he must have a good deal of skill in getting children to co-operate with him in improving their speech. Much to ask? Not more than the special knowledge and skill commonly expected of the teacher of art or handicraft or music.

(iii)

There are three questions that we must touch on, if only briefly, before we go on to methods of teaching: the use of 'speech-training' in the narrower sense, the value of phonetics, and the problem of Standard Speech.

One of the questions that a conscientious teacher

asks himself is, What is the connection between speech as communication and 'speech-training' — the jingles, the rhymes, the breathing exercises, and the sound-games? How does speech-training help children in learning to express themselves clearly, pleasantly, and effectively? It is an important question. There is a real danger that the increasing attention to speech in school may mean — as so often has happened in education — formal work faithfully done but with little benefit to man or beast.

In the development of any skill two kinds of practice are necessary — exercises which train constituent parts of the skill, and practice in the performance of the skill itself. We learn tennis partly by exercises such as hitting the ball above a white line on a wall, partly by playing the full game on the court. It is clear that the exercises must be devised so as to have a real practice effect and that they will bring little improvement unless there is a desire to improve, the most effective incentive being a conviction that the exercises really do help the game.

Speech is a form of skill ; speech exercises will only be effective if, first, they do in fact train constituent parts of the art of speech, and secondly, if the learner is impelled by a desire to improve in them, particularly by the conviction that speech exercises improve speech. Otherwise — as many teachers have only too much reason to suspect — 'speech-training' may go on week after week with little or no effect upon speaking.

Are speech-training exercises really exercises in speech — do jingles, for instance, improve breathing, intonation, enunciation? The answer seems to be that experienced teachers of speech think so, although it would be difficult to find experimental evidence to support them. To some extent this lack of evidence does not matter : the knowledge gained by traditional practice is often ahead of scientific demonstration. But it should at any rate breed a cautious attitude, for science often shows that tradition is wrong. In other words, there is room for a good deal

of careful and open-minded, observation of the effects of speech-training upon speech.

As to incentive, this will be different according to the age of the children. For the younger ones the exercises, if well devised and used with understanding, will usually provide their own incentive ; but boys and girls of secondary school age will rarely find this sufficient unless they can also see the actual connection between the partial exercises and the integrated skill of speech as a means of communication.

It therefore becomes the teacher's business to make sure as well as he can that the exercises are useful, and at the same time to see that wherever possible a close relation is set up between speech-training and speech. The choice of exercises for speech-training should normally be determined by the teacher's observations of the children's speech ; in turn, exercises should sometimes prepare for coming class-work in speaking. Examples of both these ways of connecting speech-training with speech will be given later.

The second problem that troubles many conscientious teachers is the place and value of phonetics. Now there is very little doubt that the teacher of speech cannot hope to go far unless he has a good grounding in phonetics. A knowledge of the production of the sounds of spoken English will enable him to distinguish between dialectal forms and peculiarities of enunciation, will quicken his perception of speech defects, and above all will increase his ability to help children to improve their speech, by enabling him to guide them the more accurately to produce particular sounds. Discussions with teachers and observations of speech work in schools show that confusion in thought and in practice is frequently due to ignorance of phonetics ; many teachers, aware of this, have gone to a good deal of trouble to remedy the deficiency by taking special courses.

But phonetics for children is another story. Speech is

one of those intricate skills, built up by habit, which work the better the less one thinks about the underlying mechanism. We learn swimming by swimming and perhaps by exercises in the gym. and on the bank, not by studying physiology and hydrostatics. And since even the teacher would find it difficult to demonstrate more than a tenuous connection between a knowledge of phonetics and skill in the art of speech it is not surprising that a boy or girl fails to perceive it. There would appear to be little justification for a course in English phonetics for the ordinary English child.

The third question very much in the mind of many teachers is that of Standard Speech. On the whole the difficulty is not, in spite of what is sometimes said, to determine what is standard speech in this country. Educated speakers, wherever they may live, use a fairly well defined range of sounds, constituting — with some variants, no doubt — a body of English speech that the radio has made familiar everywhere. The question is rather whether children who have been brought up to speak a dialect well outside the range of this standard speech should not be taught something approaching the standard, either to supersede or to supplement their own dialect.

It is a troublesome problem because emotion as well as reason enters into it. There is little hope that it can be solved calmly and amicably simply by appealing to what is demonstrably reasonable. A man's native speech is probably more closely bound up with his feelings than any other personal characteristics — today even more closely than religion. But it is to this very fact that we may look with the greatest hope, for if it can be shown that it is necessary for the health of our society that there shall be a truly common speech, then we may perhaps hope to bring this about by an appeal to feeling ; by fostering a pride in nothing less than spoken English, speech common to all who live in these islands.

What justification then is there for this? There are

perhaps two parts to the answer. First, no English dialect is by nature superior to any other. Some dialects may seem to us more 'picturesque' than others, some more 'educated' than others; but these are values that have become attached to different forms of speech in the course of our history, by the association of circumstances, and are by no means fixed and unchanging.

Secondly, there can be no doubt that it really is a bad thing for our society that we lack a truly common language. Nothing divides Englishmen into classes, more or less mutually exclusive, so much as differences in speech — not even differences of income, food, or dress. However picturesque a dialect may seem, it is certain that a child brought up to speak one of the lower-priced dialects — and the basis of price is tradition, prejudice, and snob-value — will be at a social handicap so long as he speaks that dialect alone. To have a full chance in our society so that he may really avail himself of his full democratic rights he must become either bilingual or modify his native dialect so that it is innocuous. We must have a common speech if we believe that democracy is not merely a method of government but a way of life. It is a fantastic transposition of values to wish to preserve 'picturesque' dialects at the expense of the social health of our community.

Here, then, are our aims in the school: to educate every child in the use of spoken English, so that his speech will be clear, pleasant, expressive, and effective, a means of communication — not a barrier — between him and his fellow-countrymen; remembering always that communication implies listening as well as speaking.

(iv)

Before the teacher enters the classroom there is a buzz of conversation; he puts his nose through the door and it stops. The lesson is "oral composition"; the teacher laboriously squeezes a few reluctant, formal, and stilted

sentences from an otherwise dumb class. At length the lesson is over. The teacher has barely closed the door behind him before unauthorised oral composition is again in full swing.

The moral of this is a platitude : boys and girls do not need to be taught to speak as they are taught other 'subjects'. They have been practising the art of speech since they were born. Normally and unless they have been made self-conscious they have no sense of original sin about their speech ; they do not feel 'weak' in speech as perhaps in geography or arithmetic. The impulse to speak is there and the ability to speak is taken for granted.

The cultivation of spoken English is therefore both easier and harder than teaching most other things. The teacher is helped both by the primary impulse and by the skill already there. But he has also to work upon a foundation of speech habits firmly established and resistant to change, and often in the face of an entire lack of incentive to improve.

Fortunately, however, in the earlier part of school life the main incentive to any kind of work is the enjoyment that comes from doing the work itself. It is only as children move up through the secondary school that they ask, more and more insistently, Why do this? Broadly speaking, if an activity is to have incentive, in the primary school it must have meaning in itself, in the secondary school meaning beyond itself.

These, then, are our aims and main principles in the cultivation of spoken English in the school. Let us now turn to practical suggestions. We have in mind everyday conversation, the giving of instructions, and the arts of narration, description, exposition, and argument, linking these with exercises in speech-training and supplementing them with the cultivation of the art of listening.

(v)

Everyday conversation ; in the Junior School this looks after itself. Games, dialogues, plays — there is no difficulty in getting younger children to give themselves to these with zest, and no undue demand upon the skill of a teacher in guiding them in the direction of benefit to the children's speech. It is in the secondary school that the difficulties begin and multiply. The boys and girls are shy and self-conscious, they no longer care much for classroom games, and make-believe seems silly ; the prospective rewards of adult life are still too remote to form a strong incentive for work to be done here and now. On the whole, then, the teacher's safest policy will probably be to make sure that the work is connected as closely as possible with present and immediate interests while at the same time it is ' real ' and ' grown-up ', so that it does not incur the adolescent's scorn of what is ' made-up ' and babyish.

Imaginary interviews — which may be imaginary so long as they picture real life — make a good beginning : shopping, applying for a post, obtaining information from one of the many Government and municipal offices that the war has brought into the everyday lives of ordinary people. From this ground the boys and girls will soon be ready to take off on more ambitious flights : imaginative dialogues (always as ' grown-up ' as possible) between characters from fiction, from films, or from contemporary life. Then telephone conversations : these should as far as possible be ' real ', a stimulating variant of this being to guess at the unheard half of a telephone conversation — it is not difficult or expensive to fit up a telephone between the classroom and some other part of the school building. As skill and interest in dialogue grow, direct practice may be supplemented by the detailed study of dialogue — from modern plays, for instance ; or some of the qualities of good conversation may be made more salient by comparing a spoken dialogue centred about

some episode with silent miming of it : the silent film compared with the talkie.

Success in work of this kind, as in so much else in school, depends not of course on the methods and devices used but on the insight and skill of the teacher. We suggest here a few tentative principles that emerge from the experience of a number of teachers.

Perhaps the most important condition of success is the general atmosphere of the work. For the children there must be continued interest and enjoyment and a realisation that teacher and class are working together to improve what most of them can already do fairly well. The work should be so directed that emphasis falls upon the function of speech as a means of communication ; the centre of attention should be the question, How far does the speaker succeed in expressing what is in his mind, clearly and effectively? Criticism, wherever this is necessary, should be forward-looking and positive rather than concerned with the detection of faults ; the criteria of good speech should arise from the common sense of the children themselves rather than be laid down as final rules by the teacher as arbiter. In this way the most important condition of the cultivation of good speech will be provided : the presence of a real audience, who show approval or dissatisfaction, understanding or bewilderment in their manner and spontaneous responses rather than by formal criticism, and so exert social pressure upon the speaker, none the less strong for being implicit.

If these conditions are present there should be little difficulty in securing active interest in the three necessary stages of all work in spoken English : preparation, performance, and follow-up. There is of course no need for a rigid system or a formal elaboration of these stages. But a dialogue will at any rate be sketched out and talked over in informal discussion beforehand ; will be followed by the class as an audience interested not merely or even primarily in speech but rather in the story unfolding in

front of them ; and will be followed up by discreet suggestions by the teacher, in discussion with the class.

The teacher's skill will show itself in the effectiveness with which he enters into the first and third stages though keeping himself out of the second. While a dialogue is going on he should be an observer, taking notes of points towards which subsequent work may be guided. Certainly he should restrain himself from interrupting. And even in the preparation and follow-up he should be unobtrusive, making himself felt rather than heard.

In the stage of preparation, although he works by suggestion rather than by rule he can do much in guiding boys and girls to a right attitude and the right principles of skill. It is clear that preparation for a dialogue should rarely — in the work with which we are here concerned — consist of a written version to be read out or learnt by heart. These are either reading aloud or acting — speech as an interpretative art, not the art of communication ; we are concerned with the education of children in the art of expressing, by means of living speech, what is in their minds.

Later, in following up their class-work the teacher has an opportunity of reminding them of relevant points in recent speech-training and discussing with them which points need to be dealt with by further exercise. Obviously this must be done with discretion ; he defeats his own ends when he makes them too conscious of their speech. But he should be able to establish a real connection between training and performance, the exercises taking their place as a necessary aid to the improvement of speech, the goal towards which teacher and class are working together.

These are some of the general principles that emerge from experience of class-work in dialogue and conversation. Similar principles are applicable to the other forms of spoken English.

(vi)

The use of the spoken word as a medium for instructions is, as we have said, a growing feature of our everyday lives. Our aims in school follow naturally: accuracy, clarity, coherence, and effectiveness in giving instructions; accuracy and facility in interpreting them. It is in work of this kind that the child becomes aware of what is more and more important as his education in speech grows: that ideas and their arrangement in presentation need at least as much attention as the spoken word and its delivery. It is in fact one of the principles valid throughout the whole range of speech education: matter rather than form should be the ostensible aim for the child. .

Here, even more than in dialogue and conversation, is it important that there should be a sense of realness throughout the work. Dialogue and conversation may, by the momentum of their intrinsic interest, often carry themselves through; but the giving and understanding of instructions will be intolerably arid and formal unless they have real meaning for speaker and listener. The topics chosen should demand real instructions, the effectiveness of which can be tested in practice by the accuracy with which they can be carried out. At every point, therefore, there must be training in listening as well as speaking.

Suitable instances will occur to every teacher. Often they will arise naturally from the day-to-day life of the school. In every group there are some who by personality, interest, or experience are well fitted to instruct others. A monitor or prefect may, for example, explain the routine of fire-drill or prepare for the reception of a visitor or explain plans for an expedition from the school. Sometimes these immediately practical instructions may be varied by the introduction of make-believe — but with a real basis — for instance, planning and giving instructions to a railway or other crowd.

The main principles that we have already suggested

will apply here. The task of the speaker is to make himself clear ; that of the listeners to understand so as to be able to put into action what has been said. The function of the audience is thus as fundamental here as in all other speech education : to exercise both implicit and overt pressure upon the speaker to express himself clearly and effectively. The overt pressure will take the form of approval of clarity and accuracy, or of adverse criticism of vagueness and incoherence. The implicit pressure will be present when questions of fact are asked, and particularly when instructions are translated into action, so that speaker and audience together become aware of the effectiveness — in accuracy, order, clarity, coherence — of what has been said.

The function of the teacher emerges of itself. It is certainly not to act as sole and final arbiter of the speaker's achievement. For the only sure way in which a speaker can be brought to put his whole mind and skill into the task of making himself understood is for him to feel that he really is engaged in communication, that those whom he is addressing are at least as much concerned with what he says as with how he says it. In the classroom a speaker will feel this only if his audience are able to respond and question him quite freely. The teacher's most useful function is therefore to be one of an audience, whom he guides rather than represents. It is for him to set the tone, so that all feel that the job in hand is to gain skill in the act of giving instructions, not to bring to light a speaker's faults. And all the time the teacher silently observes those points that require special attention and by bringing them into subsequent exercises again links up the practice of speech with speech-training.

(vii)

So far speech has been relatively informal. We now come to narration, description, and the exposition of a

process — more formal kinds, needing more attention to presentation and lending themselves therefore to more systematic guidance. Perhaps it is because they are more susceptible of systematic treatment that they have found a readier welcome from some teachers than conversation or the giving of instructions and are more often included in school curricula, but it is perhaps for the same reason that they do not receive so ready a welcome from the ordinary child at the secondary stage. The junior child takes naturally to the game of telling a story, describing what he has seen, or setting out the steps of a process. But with the senior child — more self-conscious, more aware of his shortcomings, more critical of the value of what he is asked to do — the teacher has to think about incentive.

But the principle of realness applies here as to all other speech education : the strongest incentive to good speech is to have to inform those who really are uninformed. Fortunately for the teacher this is a common state of affairs in school. The adolescent boy or girl, getting about, getting to know of the doings of his parents and other adults, developing personal interests, reading, has often something to talk about that his friends know nothing of. Hobbies, holidays, journeys, trades, processes witnessed, books, films — all these provide a rich and varied source from which good speech may naturally spring.

The important thing is to maintain the spontaneity of this flow of speech, not sacrificing it to any desire for system or correctness. The atmosphere in the classroom should not be of an "oral composition" lesson or of speech-training but of something approaching a lecture club. And this is not difficult to achieve if there really is a free choice of topic by the speaker and if the discussion following each talk is centred as much upon its content as upon its presentation and delivery : once more matter rather than form should be the ostensible aim.

Preparation, performance, follow-up — there is a place for the teacher at every stage. Neglect of preparation by

the speaker is perhaps the commonest cause of failure in his work. He must plan what he is going to say, must think out material, arrangement, illustrations. But even at the outset, preparation should never consist in writing out and learning the talk by heart or reading it aloud. To learn the art of spoken communication the adolescent must accustom himself to make the briefest notes from which he will *speak*. The teacher's business is to guide him ; it makes a great deal of difference to the success of the work if a day or two before each talk the teacher casts an eye over the preparatory scheme.

During the talk teacher and audience have each something to do : the teacher as always to make silent note of points for future treatment ; the audience to listen, discuss, and appraise. There will be real listening only if there is real speaking, and if there is real speaking there will be no need for enforced listening. In the same way, spontaneity and fluency in discussion will only come if the discussion is real ; the teacher can do much to see that real questions are asked and answered and some attempt made to think out things together.

Here, as in all other forms of speaking, the response of his audience is one of the means by which a speaker learns. By their general interest, by the questions they ask, and by the tone of the discussion, the speaker is made aware how far his talk has been successful. The teacher who is primarily concerned with education in speech need not therefore be afraid that time is being wasted while the class discuss the matter rather than the form of a lecture they have heard.

But as time goes on overt criticism also becomes important. No skill can develop far unless those who practise it learn to be critical of others and so of themselves. Criticism is, however, itself something of an art ; children need to learn how to criticise, and this requires some skill of the teacher.

If we ask a class of 12-year-olds to criticise a talk they

have just heard, the result will usually be so badly organised, ill-informed, and irrelevant as to suggest that class criticism is beyond the scope of useful school work. But if a teacher believes in the value of class criticism and is content to go slowly, he will usually see some good results of his work.

Sound procedure would seem to be not to ask too much at first, to make sure that the criteria have some meaning for the children who use them, that criticism is positive as well as negative, and above all that it does not take up an undue share of time and attention. Criticism in the earlier stages should be informal and directed upon the content ; gradually — and usually quite spontaneously — attention will turn to arrangement, presentation, and delivery. It is at this point that the teacher comes in with another of his functions : to guide the criticism so that it becomes fruitful as much to those who make it as to the speaker under discussion. Perhaps the most important principle is to begin with one or two of the more obvious features of speech, such as speed or intonation ; and it is useful in a speech-training period to make sure that the class have some notion of what these criteria mean before they proceed to use them in passing judgment upon a lecture. Gradually and in the course of time additional points may be introduced one by one, so that boys or girls by the age of 14 or 15 will be able to deal with four or five important criteria when they attempt to make an appraisal of a talk. In the meantime they will have received training not only in criticism but also in listening.

Throughout all this it is an important part of the teacher's task to see that a close connection is kept between class lectures and speech-training lessons. These should be a link between work already done and work to come : common weaknesses will be dealt with and some attempt made to prepare the way for further progress. In this way exercises in pace, phrasing, articulation, intonation, voice production will be seen by the boys or girls to have a close

relevance to improvement in the art of speaking. There is little doubt that success in all this depends upon a proper balance between specific exercises and practice in the use of speech as a means of communication, and that it needs careful organisation and supervision by the teacher, concealed though these may be in an atmosphere of informality and spontaneity.

(viii)

Discussions and debates : about these one thing should be said at the outset. They commonly fail because of an excess of formality. As to their value in school there would be little difference of opinion — they are intended to educate the adolescent to express his opinions on public questions logically, temperately, and cogently. This can hardly be brought about by practice in reading a paper or learning an address by heart. What we must attempt to cultivate is the ability to say here and now, clearly and vigorously, what one has thought about and thought out ; and the power of dealing on the spot with an argument from the other side. It involves the power of speaking to an audience whose response must to some extent determine the speaker's manner, his delivery, and the presentation of his ideas ; and this is a power not achieved by practice in speaking to a group of people who are merely a sounding-board for the public performance of a speech previously rehearsed.

It comes to this, that discussion and debate will only have the values they are expected to have if there is real discussion of a subject that really interests the debaters. Sometimes in school, because of an undue emphasis upon the forms of debate, neither of these conditions is present. The subject is of a kind that nobody outside a school would dream of discussing ; the debate, instead of being a lively interchange of opinion, becomes a dreary succession of empty parliamentary formalities.

Common sense and a clear eye on what he is aiming at should keep the teacher from wasting time in this way. There is no reason — except perhaps that desire for tidiness and system that crushes the life out of so much good work in school — why discussion or debate should be held regularly. Let informal discussion arise naturally out of the questions that follow a class lecture, or from the urgency of some current topic ; and more formal debate from this informal discussion. In a word, boys and girls should be used to class discussion long before they know they are taking part in a debate, and longer still before they have heard of the rules of debate. It does not matter whether children of 12 know the rules of debate so long as they are reasonably familiar with them by the time they leave school.

(ix)

The art of listening : this has become one of the most important skills of a modern society — possibly more important than ability to read. More and more, communication will be by means of the spoken word. It is a common view that the cinema and the radio of themselves cultivate a lazy acceptance while the theatre and the book demand an active response. The truth surely is that the liveliness and activeness of one's response is a question of habit, of training. The radio may be as harmful to our society as the tabloid press, but on the other hand has potentialities as great as anything the printed word has done for us. It is the business of the school to make the coming generation literate in the understanding and appreciation of spoken English.

How is this to be done ? It is a problem the answers to which are only now beginning to appear and which for the most part lie in the future. Every broadcast lesson heard in the classroom can unobtrusively be a lesson in the art of listening. But in addition to this constant practice there can sometimes be more direct guidance.

A class can occasionally listen to a talk with attention not so much as subject matter as on form and manner. Listening can be directed upon the three primary questions parallel to those we ask about literature: What is the speaker attempting to say? What means does he use? How far has he achieved his intention? They are the same questions that will often have been asked about children's own talks in the classroom; applied to radio listening they gain additional point and emphasis from the relative impersonality of the speaker, his skill and his prestige. Gramophone records of radio talks are particularly useful for this kind of work, giving the teacher the possibility of preparing himself and his class; they should be freely available to all schools.

The art of discriminative listening takes its place as the correlative of good speaking, and so as a part of that comprehensive education in spoken communication which has been the topic of this chapter. We have tried to show how skill in the use of the spoken word as a social medium may be cultivated in the school. The range is wide — from everyday informal conversation to formal debate — but fundamental principles remain constant. Chief among these is the recognition by the teacher that he is concerned with speech as a medium of communication rather than an interpretative art, so that the attention of the child, from the first taken up with what he intends to say, only at length comes to include how best to say it.

V

THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR

BY PAMELA GRADON

IN these latter days such an article as mine must be in the nature of an apology ; a defence, that is, and a reinterpretation. The charges brought against grammar teaching have been chiefly negative. The teaching of grammar, it has been said, has failed to achieve its professed end, the promotion of a right use and understanding of the English language. It is this charge that I hope to reconsider.

My apology is to be twofold ; it is to be concerned firstly with the content of grammar teaching ; for it is idle to improve methods if the substance of our teaching is false. Fagin was an excellent teacher but not a worthy example. Secondly, I have to consider how far English grammar, in part or as a whole, can be used in schools to help children of any type to write and speak precisely and to read intelligently.

Let us begin then by examining the content of the average grammar teaching of our time and by attempting to find out how far it represents linguistic reality. Four fallacies seem to emerge from such an investigation. The first is the confusion of historical and descriptive grammar. The substance of what we often loosely refer to as *grammar* is composed of three distinct elements. One element we might call *descriptive grammar*. Its business is to investigate and systematise the phenomena of a language at a certain point in its history. Descriptive grammar is not concerned with values. It describes but does not judge. The second element we may call *historical grammar*. The proper subject of historical grammar is the study of the history of gram-

matical forms, and like descriptive grammar it states but does not judge. The third element might perhaps be more properly called *rhetoric* than grammar. Its business is to formulate the laws of correct writing and to judge linguistic innovations. It tells us, for example, that we may not write sentences with final prepositions or split infinitives, and it derives its authority not so much from grammar as from standards of elegance.

How great the confusion of these three has been becomes clear when we compare the real structure of Modern English with the supposed structure as reflected in much of our grammar teaching. For example, forms such as *swim-suit*, *fly-bomb* are still regarded as incorrect. It is true that they are not yet Standard English, but the alleged reasons for their incorrectness are due to a confusion of the three elements of which we spoke above. Historically *swimming-suit* and *flying-bomb* may contain a gerund and a participle respectively. A *swimming-suit* is a suit for swimming and a *flying bomb* is a bomb which flies, but it is extremely doubtful whether such a distinction is alive in Modern English. Indeed, the coining of *fly-bomb* and *swim-suit* suggests forcibly that it is not, since they contain simply the root of the verb. We do not deny that such a thought distinction can be made, but it is not the business of grammar to deal with all possible thought distinctions but only those which the structure of the language expresses. Clearly then we are confusing historical with descriptive grammar and rhetoric with both if we try to condemn *swim-suit* and *fly-bomb* by reference to participles and gerunds.

As another example we might take the verbal forms *I shall go* and *He is singing*. It is customary to analyse the form *I shall go* as containing a pronoun, a modal verb, and an infinitive. Yet our chief reason for regarding *go* as an infinitive is that other languages, for example, French or German, would have an infinitive in such a position as would Old English. Similarly, when considering *He is*

singing are we to belong to the school which calls singing a gerund because historically it is probably descended from a gerundival form, *He goes a-singing*, or are we to belong to the school which calls it a participle? In both these cases our preoccupation with historical grammar has again misled us and the dominance of the printed word confused us. From the point of view of descriptive grammar the verbal elements in these forms are a unit. It is, perhaps, only a chance that English grammar books do not tell us that the future is formed in Modern English by prefixing *l* (for example, *I lgo*) and the third singular of the expanded present by prefixing *s* (for example, *He sgoing*). Philologists are familiar with at least two similar processes in the formation of the French future which is derived from the Vulgar Latin infinitive and the verb *habeo*, and in the formation of the Scandinavian passive by suffixing the accusative or dative of the reflexive pronoun. Forms such as *shall go*, *is singing* are units, and it is only the accidents of printing and elementary education which have enabled grammarians to maintain an artificial separation and analysis.

The second fallacy which we wish to consider is the idea that formal modifications of a root are the only way of indicating relationships in language. This, in fact, is not so. The formal elements in Modern English are very few. The most important of such elements can be catalogued in a few lines ; the addition of *s* (*es*) to show possession and plurality in nouns ; the indication of a past tense by either a change of the root vowel or the addition of a dental suffix ; the formation of the 3rd singular present indicative of verbs by adding *s* and the formation of compound tenses by the addition of *-ing* or a dental suffix to the root (or altering the root vowel) and then compounding with a part of the verb *to be* or *to have* ; pronouns still distinguish a nominative case except in the second person plural ; adverbs are still often distinguished by a suffix, but suffixless forms (often historically correct) are common, especially in

such expressions as *Hold tight!* ; *You are doing it wrong* ; *You are not doing it right* ; *Take it easy!* ; *Go slow!* This is perfectly reasonable since there is only a formal distinction between *a slow bus* and *a bus that goes slowly*. Yet this loss of inflections does not mean that English has become less expressive, for it has adopted other devices such as word order or intonation to express relationships. For example, there is no need for an accusative case in Modern English since we indicate a verb-object relationship by placing the direct object after the verb. Nouns do not usually have cases in Modern English. Again we can distinguish between a stick for walking and a stick which walks not by the use of a formally distinguishable gerund or participle but by intonation and stress. *A walking stick* means *a stick that walks* and *a walking stick* means *a stick for walking*.

Our third fallacy is the supposition that grammatical categories are fundamental and unchangeable. Yet in some cases the loss of inflection in Modern English has made the traditional classifications inappropriate. For example, in the sentence *You are not doing right* it is impossible to decide whether the word *right* is an adverb or a noun, that is, the categories adverb and noun have here become meaningless. To suggest that the word is a noun since the substitution of the adverb *well* alters the meaning of the sentence is only to darken counsel. Language does not change uniformly and it is rarely legitimate to argue from one form to another. What we have already said about adverbs adequately illustrates the point. Many people would say *Hold tight!* who would not think of saying *He sings lovely*.

The fourth and last fallacy is the idea that thought distinctions and formal distinctions are co-terminous. On the contrary, a thought distinction may exist but not be expressed, or one form may be used to express more than one conception. As an example of the first, we might point out that the conception of the passive exists equally in *I was given an apple* and *I received an apple* but only in the first

example is the passive idea formally expressed. Yet it would be difficult to explain to a child why *received* is not passive. A similar distinction between active and passive exists but is not expressed in the older and modern meanings of *pitiful*. The idea is active in *Let the pitifulness of Thy great mercy loose us* but passive in *a pitiful sight*. As an example of the second case, we might quote the sentence *I was sent a message saying I was to come at once* where we have the passive not used primarily to express the passive idea but in the place of an impersonal construction. We use the construction, in fact, when we do not wish to obtrude the idea of the sender. We emphasise the logical subject by making it the grammatical subject. Having no appropriate grammatical machinery to do this we adapt existing machinery.

Examples of these four fallacies could easily be multiplied for they are commonplaces in any book on the teaching of grammar. Indeed it has long been realised by philologists that Modern English is far less like Latin, although Latin grammar has for many centuries been the model for English grammarians, than like Chinese which has got rid of inflectional elements and replaced them by particles. An obvious example of this in Modern English is the replacing of inflectional endings by prepositions. Like English, Chinese was once an inflected language but it has gone further than Modern English in the abolition of inflections. Modern English seems to be half-way between an inflectional and an isolating structure. Hence part of our difficulty as grammar teachers. When we are dealing with pronouns, for example, we are dealing with a language mechanism essentially different from the type of language mechanism used to express a subject-verb-object relationship. The essential distinction between the two types of mechanism is this. In an inflected language the relation of each word to each other word within the sentence is indicated by formal modification of a root. For example in English we say *of two good slaves* but in

Latin *duorum bonorum servorum*. In an isolating language, on the other hand, relationships are indicated chiefly by word order and simple juxtaposition or by particles. For example, in Chinese, although possession can be indicated by a particle, a genitive can, also, be indicated by position. For example, *zintek* = man courage, that is, *the courage of a man*. In English we might compare such compounds as *Mansoul*, *doorbell*, *week-end*. We, also, have simple juxtaposition in such a phrase as *a hundred men* which in the earlier stage of our language would be *a hundred of men*, *of men* being expressed by a genitive case.

The first requisite then, if grammar teaching is to be effective as an educational instrument, is that we should bring up to date the content of our grammar teaching. Too many teachers reject grammar because they are only familiar with the grammar that was taught when they themselves were at school! Geographers do not teach children the cosmography of Ptolemy or scientists the doctrine of the humours although the heavens and the human body are unchanged. How much less reasonable to apply the ancient rules to language, which changes almost daily! Yet how foolish to cease teaching geography or physiology altogether because the mediaeval doctrines are no longer palatable! The business of all those who value the English language is clearly to learn to understand the nature of the English language as it is now spoken.

The question we have next to consider is what relationship such an understanding bears or should bear to the teaching of grammar in schools. Such a question brings us back to the beginning of our paper. What can we hope to accomplish by the teaching of grammar in schools? Various reasons for teaching grammar in schools have been offered.

- (1) The teaching of grammar helps children to learn the grammar of other languages.
- (2) The teaching of grammar is a logical discipline.

- (3) The teaching of grammar helps children to write correctly.

It is certainly true that the English teacher can help language teachers by instruction in formal grammar, but it does not follow that it is therefore the business of the English teacher to give such instruction. It surely concerns the language teacher to explain to her pupils the structure of the language which she is teaching. Moreover, in the case at least of Latin, the teacher has in some ways a simpler task than the teacher of English because her instruction is so much more formal. It is easier for a child to see what is meant by a noun, let us say, in Latin than in English where the formal criteria are so few. Much formal grammar could, I believe, be left until a child starts a second foreign language when she can be introduced to the grammatical concepts of those languages which she is studying. This, moreover, would ensure that those children who are likely to go on to academic careers would receive the necessary grammatical equipment while those who were not academic would not be burdened with unnecessary information.

Nor do I believe the second proposition to be true unless we use the term logic in a very wide sense. Then we may admit that both logic and grammar are both to a limited extent concerned with such thought categories as quality and substance. Yet even then there are three causes which severely limit such a correspondence. In the first place, language is not consistent in its categories, which are often inadequate for the expression of meaning. For example, in a sentence such as *I like pigs* the plural should imply that I like *pigs* but not *a pig*, since the categories singular and plural are mutually exclusive. In fact, of course, the sentence does not imply anything of the kind. Linguistically the idiom is adequate but logically we require a grammatical category to express a species as well as the individual. Sometimes such a lack leads to

practical difficulties. We often feel the need for a pronoun of neutral gender to be used when the idea of gender is irrelevant and Modern English is trying to supply such a pronoun by using the plural for this purpose. Hence the idiom *Let everyone fetch their coats* which is obviously preferable to the cumbersome *Let everyone fetch his or her coat*.

In the second place, idiom is often not consistent even in the use of such categories as do exist. For example, the Modern English use of negatives is governed by the conception that two negatives make an affirmative. But what are we to say of such idioms as *I shouldn't be surprised if he didn't fail* which should mean *I expect he will pass* but in fact means *I expect he will fail*? The common connection between logic and grammar indeed is based on the idea that linguistic forms are constants whereas in fact they are variables.

In the third place (and this is a much more serious objection), such categories as do exist in grammar are often the reflection of a primitive way of thought. It is, perhaps, easier to see this in other languages than our own. In Japanese, for example, we find different forms of the numeral used according to the shape of the objects to be numbered. In some of the American Indian languages we find nouns classified according to the shape of the objects represented. The category of gender in German, to take another example, obviously bears no relationship to reality. It is merely the relic of primitive speech habits and ways of thought. The categories of gender and number in Modern English are often irrelevant in the same way. Even the categories of quality and substance represented by the grammatical categories of adjective and noun do not hold the central position in modern thought that they held in the thought of the Greeks and Schoolmen. In fact we might say that most of our grammatical categories are no longer significant from the point of view of logic although the retention of certain formal elements in language make them partially significant from the point of view of

grammar. If the study of language is anything but the study of language it is the study of human thought rather than logic. In fact it belongs rather to psychology than to philosophy. Only in a very negative way, then, can grammar be regarded as a logical discipline.

The consideration of the third proposition requires some grouping of the different types of error which occur in children's writing. In my experience the greater part of children's mistakes comes within one of the following classes :

- (1) The misuse of words, particularly prepositions.
- (2) Technical errors due to ignorance of accident. As examples we might mention the following :
 - (a) The wrong case of the relative *who* or the personal pronouns, e.g. *between you and I*.
 - (b) Mistakes of number, e.g. *none . . . are*.
 - (c) The use of *than* as a preposition and *like* as a conjunction.
 - (d) The use of *there* as a singular subject, e.g. *There is twenty dogs in the garden*.
- (3) Faulty syntax, e.g. sentences without verbs.

Let us consider then how far the teaching of grammar can help children over such difficulties as these. Obviously grammar cannot help children to the right use of words. That comes only by constant reading and practice. Children do not, in fact, often commit malapropisms. Their mistakes are usually of the elusive kind for which it is impossible to provide by rules. Each case must be learnt separately. Clearly then there is no place for formal grammar here. With our other two classes the case is different. I have never found, but perhaps my experience is not representative, that the second class represents a large percentage of the errors in children's work. Nor do I consider that such faults when they do occur are serious, and it is perhaps in our attitude to such faults most of all that we need a clearer policy. Our real difficulty here

lies in fixing the line to be drawn between good and bad grammar. Linguists have always realised that a solecism in one age may be pedantry in the next. We see this clearly if we consider the linguistic controversies of the past. Steele, for example, in *Spectator* No. 78 laments that the pronouns *who* and *which* are being replaced by the upstart *that*, not realising either that *who* and *which* had themselves supplanted *that*, or that the day would come when such a sentence as *I know the man that you mean* would be regarded as unexceptionable. Fortunately good sense prevailed and *that* gradually replaces the tiresome and unmanageable *who*. Clearly if all changes in language are to be frowned upon, our educational system will soon prove a dead weight to our language. We have to decide which natural developments are good and which bad. I would suggest a very simple criterion. Those grammatical innovations are bad which make language less clear and less expressive. It is a simple and obvious standard but one that is not often recognised. It seems to me unnecessary to tell a child, for example, that she must not write *Mary is taller than me*. On what does such a rule rest? Simply on the presupposition that *than* is a conjunction and therefore cannot govern an accusative case. We are reminded of Belinda

Let spades be trumps, she said, and trumps they were !

Similarly, there is no adequate reason for condemning *Who are you sending that to?* It is perfectly clear and adequately expressive. The objection to *There is twenty dogs in the garden* is again based on a grammatical hypothesis. *There*, being historically an adverb, is not the subject of the sentence and therefore cannot be in agreement with a verb. Yet far stronger in Modern English than any sense of concord is the feeling for word order, and one of the basic rules for word order in Modern English is that the subject precedes the verb. To attempt to combat such constructions by means of grammatical explanations is, then, to be guilty

of a double error. We are supposing that language is and should be immutable and we are supposing that there is a logic behind grammar so that by admitting innovations we are damaging the fabric of the language. On the contrary I believe that errors of the type *There is two cats in the garden* should be explained to children in terms of convention rather than grammar. It is very simple to show a child the conventional nature of speech by pointing out that, although we could make ourselves understood by saying, for example, *I my coat put on*, in fact, we always do say *I put on my coat*.

It appears then that in dealing with faults of the first and second type the teaching of formal grammar is not of great value. When we come to consider the third type the question becomes more difficult. The fundamental question is, What difficulties do children find in writing and can grammar help them?

Some of the difficulties which children find in writing are due to certain psychological limitations inherent in a child's mind. Of such difficulties we might mention two in particular. In the first place, we notice that children often have difficulty in explaining even matters which they appear to understand. This often results in a clumsy, perverted way of writing which is not so much ungrammatical as unidiomatic. This, I believe, is not a grammatical problem at all but a problem of selection. Intelligence tests show that children find it much easier to state differences than similarities. That is, they find it more difficult to say what an object is like than what it is not like. Hence part of their difficulty in describing objects. They have not yet learnt to analyse and dissociate.

In the second place, small children find difficulty in perceiving and therefore in expressing certain relationships. Investigation of the vocabulary of small children, for example, shows that one of the last idioms they master is the idiom expressing causal connection. Piaget in *Language and Thought in the Child* gives an example of this.

A child in attempting to describe a simple mechanism said *It is shut and it can't find the little pipe*, meaning *Because it is shut it can't find the little pipe*. We find the same characteristic in primitive languages. Parataxis comes before syntax.

Clearly practice in writing and description must here play their part by reinforcing and encouraging the natural development of the child's mind. Yet we believe that there is, also, place for a more technical study of syntax. The processes of writing and speaking are highly complex, far more complex probably because apparently far less homogeneous than such a mental process as calculation. In the first place, both writing and speaking are to some extent a skill in that they depend upon the co-ordination of physical factors. A sentence, for example, is an intonation unit, that is, a sentence has an intonation pattern depending ultimately on the relative frequency of the vibrations of the vocal cords. Rhythm, also, plays a large though as yet ill-defined part in our speech habits. On the other hand, the grammatical sentence is a highly artificial unit depending upon an analysis of what is felt by primitive people and children to be a unit. We begin, in fact, not by learning the parts of a sentence and then learning how to put the parts together, but by the process known as *syncretism*. We form a *schema*, or impression of a whole which we gradually learn to dissociate. Synthesis is the first process and analysis the second. Indeed anyone who has learnt a foreign language knows this to be true of adult experience too. For example, if learning German, we master the sentence order of the language both by practice, that is by learning a pattern which we eventually repeat automatically in certain cases, but, also, by learning the rules governing word order.⁵ We could learn the language by the first process only, but we learn it very much more quickly if we add the second: This is indeed to be expected if language is, as we have suggested, to some extent a skill, for tests in the manual sphere have shown that in manual operations although practice in assembling

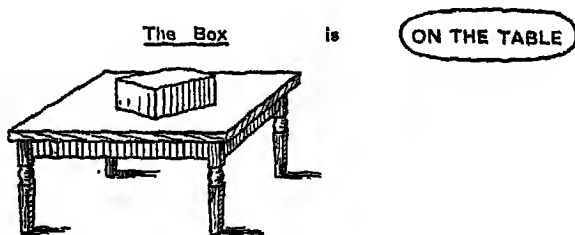
work of a particular sort has little or no influence on skill in assembling work of a different sort, when instruction is given in the basic principles underlying assembling operations a very considerable transfer of skill to other operations and a greater speed of acquisition ensues (cf. Fox, *Educational Psychology*, xiii, and note 16).

I believe, therefore, that in teaching children to write clearly and correctly instruction in syntax can be extremely valuable if so presented as to help and not conflict with the natural psychological limitations of a child's mind. We must always remember that English teaching is more like Physical Training than any other subject on the curriculum. Human beings cannot readily contract bad History habits or bad Latin habits or bad Arithmetic habits. They merely forget their History, Latin, and Arithmetic. In English and Physical Training, on the other hand, neglect results in bad habits. Therefore positive instruction is needed to counteract such habits. But as in physical education instruction must go hand in hand with the physical development of the child, so in English grammar instruction must go hand in hand with the linguistic and psychological development of the child. Grammar teaching can only be of benefit when it reinforces and organises the child's own linguistic development. Otherwise, however skilful our methods, we are only teaching a child grammar as we teach a dog tricks and it is extremely doubtful whether the child is any the better. The process must be twofold; constant practice in reading, writing, and speaking and constant practice in analysis of what we read, write, and say. The proportions of these two elements will depend largely on the type of child being taught, the less intelligent learning largely by imitation, the more intelligent child profiting to a greater degree by analysis.

Finally, I should like to make tentative suggestions towards a scheme for grammar teaching in schools. Its final form must be worked out by those who know more

both of teaching and child psychology than I do. If I can suggest a method of tackling or even of reconsidering the question I shall have accomplished my purpose.

In the first place, I should like to make a few suggestions about the teaching of formal categories. We have already tried to suggest that the categories known as the parts of speech are really formal categories for the most part. Early grammatical teaching, then, should begin with simple instruction in the few formal criteria of English and an introduction to the conceptions of object, motion, and direction (noun, verb, preposition). These should as far as possible be taught dramatically since they are categories based on the material world. Teaching of syntax should not be deferred until a later period but started at the same time, but no attempt should be made to write or understand the complex sentence. Parataxis is the natural way of expression for small children and syntax teaching in the early stages should be concentrated on the simple and compound sentence. Here use can be made particularly of the very strong feeling for the order subject-verb-object, and here again it can be taught dramatically. If the teacher wishes to use diagrams I believe that it is always the diagram that should be analysed, not the sentence, in the early stages. We should not attempt to split up phrases but rather present them as a unit. Let us take, for example, a sentence such as *The box is on the table*. We should begin by drawing the diagram first. Then, and then only, should we add the descriptive sentence and point out the phrase indicating position :



On no account at this stage should we attempt a further analysis of the phrase. Syntax in the early stages of grammar teaching should indeed be rather descriptive than consciously analytical. Conceptions should be formed as they naturally form in real life, by the *gradual dissociation of a schema*.

In the second place, I should like to make a suggestion about the grouping of grammar teaching. It is well known that the adolescent finds great difficulty in concentrating on a purely analytical and rational subject such as grammar. I believe therefore that the more formal parts of grammar could, in view of their simplicity in English, be mastered between the ages approximately of 10 and 12. This has the advantage of allowing a year's instruction in English grammar before beginning French. Where the child is going on to Latin or German, formal concepts will be naturally increased by contact with languages more highly inflected than English.

At about the age of 12 there may be a bifurcation according to the languages which a child is learning. This offers great practical difficulties in schools where the classes are not organised on the parallel system, but where forms are organised according to the number of languages learnt there should be no difficulty. If by the age of 12 plus we may assume that the child has a grasp of the fundamentals of language study, that is, the general categories of noun, verb, and preposition, the relationship of subject-verb-object, and the simple formal criteria in English, then we may concentrate on one or other aspect of language study according to the nature of the children and their pursuits. The non-linguistic type of child, which, Intelligence Tests seem to suggest, tends to coincide with the less intelligent types, should concentrate on language study chiefly from the point of view of mastering the sentence and obtaining clarity and precision rather than elaboration of style and from the point of view of comprehension. I would suggest that formal sentence analysis and analysis

into clauses is not a congenial pursuit for children of this type. They should rather be taught the structure of the sentence by means of questions on sentences in texts that they read. This is often difficult as texts so rarely have suitable sentences, but it is possible to make the way easier by oral work. It is legitimate to make up sentences as long as they are realistic but this stage should always lead on to texts. Let us take an example. Suppose we meet in a text a sentence of this type : "While I was on my way to King's yesterday I saw a man who, because he was lame, had great difficulty in boarding the bus". Now instead of underlining the verbs, marking the joining words, and extracting the main clause I would suggest the following procedure. We say "X tells us that he saw a man yesterday. When did he see him? What was conspicuous about him? Why could he not get on the bus?" This kind of analysis should be frequently introduced into English lessons until the pupils get the feeling of the various kinds of clauses and sentences. To reinforce this teaching lessons on sentence structure can be used. For example, with smaller children we can make them construct sentences by starting with a statement and making the children add clauses by asking questions such as why and when. Children learn to speak by playing with speech, by imitation and practice. This is possible with speech as we are always talking and hearing people talk, but in order to learn to write the means of imitation and practice must be artificially supplied.

Finally, it must never be forgotten that there is a vital relationship between expression and comprehension. It is almost unbelievable how much better children speak and write when they speak or write of that in which they are interested. Even technicalities such as punctuation and spelling improve when a child is dealing with a congenial subject. If grammar teaching has failed in the past to influence speech and writing I believe it is partly because this is forgotten. Grammar lessons will not teach a child

to write correctly on any subject whether it is understood or not. But where we enlarge interests and quicken sensibility there we can teach grammar successfully. The aim of all teaching is to some extent to make explicit what is implicit but especially is this true of English teaching.

With the more linguistic children our grammar lessons should be of a different type. We have already said that those children who are learning Latin or German may learn more of the formal side of grammar, but on no account should it be suggested that all the categories which are to be found in Latin exist in English. The aim of the teaching both of the Latin and English teacher should be simple comparative study of methods of expression. A great deal of harm is done, I believe, by twisting English sentences in order to make pupils remember Latin constructions. Let us take a simple example of the kind of matter which we should present to children of this type. Suppose that the children have been learning the ways of expressing condition in Greek or Latin. They will no doubt learn to recognise a conditional clause quite readily in English. But many teachers of grammar leave the matter there, and the result is that children either grow up with the idea that the thought distinction implied by the use of the subjunctive and optative moods is quite foreign to English or are taught to look for subjunctives in English where in fact they do not exist. I maintain that an essential part of their grammar teaching is the discussion and observation of such sentences as

If *I get* married *I shall marry* a millionaire
and

If *I got* married *I should marry* a millionaire
and

If *I had got* married *I should have married* a millionaire

Similarly in the teaching of tenses we too often ignore distinctions of meaning and treat our extremely subtle

tense system as if it were a kind of penny-in-the-slot machine. For example, many children are never shown the difference between time and tense and believe that the present tense always indicates present time. They could not tell the difference between

I *am getting* the 10.15 on Saturday
and

I *get* the 10.15 on Saturday.

They do not realise, although for practical reasons it is good that they should, the difference between *May I help you?* and *Shall I help you?* or between *Might, May, Can I interrupt you for a moment?*

I am not suggesting, of course, that we should fill children's notebooks with form and definitions. What I am suggesting is that we should help them to use the tools now lying idle in their hands. Teachers who favour projects have a ready instrument in Basic English. There is no sterner test of one's grasp of one's own language than an attempt to analyse Basic. We can encourage younger children (say 13 plus, 14 plus) by the keeping of notebooks in which they put down anything grammatically interesting or unusual which they have heard or read. Finally, all such teaching must be combined with perpetual practice in reading, writing, and talking. And that such a plan may not seem Utopian I must add that I know from my own experience that linguistic awareness and general interest in linguistic problems can be stimulated, for I have myself been the willing follower of many red-herrings.

Speech is a fundamental human activity which we cannot afford to neglect nor yet confine within the bounds of a simple *hic iacet*. Speech is a living thing; it grows and develops, and like a plant it needs pruning and feeding. The problem is a large one and concerns many people. It concerns examining bodies; it concerns those who train teachers; it concerns all those who deal with the environ-

ment of our children, for it is from their environment that their speech habits grow. And so intimately related are speech and thought that ultimately a training in language must be a training in thought and methods of thought. This consideration alone should be sufficient to make us deal imaginatively and effectively with what has too long been known as the *problem of grammar*.

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VI

THE TEACHING OF PROSE COMPOSITION

BY M. ALDERTON PINK

It is a familiar charge brought by employers and others that boys and girls leave secondary and public schools without having learned to write good English. What truth is there in this? Often, of course, the employer who makes the complaint means only that his new junior clerk has not learned the particular turns of phrase that are common form in the letters and documents of the firm. The youngster might equally well incur the charge that he had never learned to do a simple sum in arithmetic, because he does not see at once how to do a routine calculation peculiar to the business; and, if he happens to be in a shipping office, he might be accused of culpable ignorance of geography, because he does not happen to know as much as he might about the particular countries served by the company's ships. Those who complain of school attainments in this way tend to forget that the boy who leaves school at 16 or even later is after all an immature person; there are still considerable gaps in his knowledge; and, even when he has good command of the technique of composition, he is often without the experience of people and the ways of the world to enable him to turn out a neatly phrased business letter. A good deal of this sort of criticism is therefore rather unreasonable.

At the same time, teachers of English would not wish to rest in the comfortable self-assurance that everything is as it should be. They are aware of the unfortunate results of an overcrowded curriculum dominated by examinations. They realise that the efforts of their pupils

are dispersed in so many directions and under such pressure that the quality of both thought and expression is bound to suffer. As they watch examination candidates battling against time in their answers in history, geography, and so on, and getting down facts at all costs in such English as they can muster, they are not surprised that the general standard of writing leaves something to be desired. They must necessarily deplore the vicious separation of senior pupils into "Arts" and "Science" forms, and the abandonment by science students of all but a perfunctory study of English; and they frankly admit that the schools are year by year turning out shoals of competent technicians who are only half literate.

But these broad questions of the curriculum must not be pursued here. I mention them only to indicate the handicaps under which English teaching suffers and to offer a partial rebuttal of certain charges. We have to consider how the teacher of prose composition can make the best of his opportunities within the limitations of existing syllabuses and time-tables. That there has been a great improvement in this department of school work in recent years will, I think, be generally admitted. There has been much fruitful experiment resulting in a healthy variety of method. Certain general principles have also been pretty well established. It is mainly with these that I shall concern myself in the following remarks.

THE CRAFT OF WRITING

The title of the present essay is the one suggested by the General Editor of the volume. I can imagine that some writers on the subject would have preferred a more ambitious title such as "Teaching the Art of Writing". My own alternative title, if I wished to provide one, would be "Teaching the Craft of Writing". I should deliberately choose the word 'craft' to counter the excessive claims sometimes made concerning what can be achieved

by the teacher of prose composition. Prose-writing in its finest flowering of course takes its rank among the arts. But no art is ever taught. The secret of artistic expression is the individual possession of the artist and cannot be communicated. So-called teachers of art — in so far as they are genuine artists themselves — are a source of encouragement and inspiration ; but what they mostly do for their pupils is to provide them with opportunities and material for practice, and teach them the use of tools and methods of work. The subject matter of their instruction must necessarily be the technique of a craft — the tricks of the trade.

So I do not think it necessary to discuss how to initiate pupils into the art of 'creative writing'. In the classroom the teacher cannot do much about it. I do not mean, of course, that he should confine his pupils' work to writing business letters, formal essays, and exercises in *précis*. On the contrary, he should furnish opportunities for the most varied kinds of writing, including those which give the fullest scope for imagination and originality ; and where he finds evidence of special ability he should be ready with encouragement and help by means of individual criticism and suggestions for reading. But in dealing with talented pupils no less than with those of average literary aptitude his chief task in the classroom must be to teach them to use the tool of language with skill and precision — to train them in craftsmanship.

By a metaphor we speak of the tool of language. But language is not strictly comparable with the painter's brush or the sculptor's chisel. It is not a mechanical implement ; it is the living expression of thought. Training in the use of language is therefore training in the processes of thought. Thus the English teacher who is trying to get his pupils to express themselves with clarity and precision is sharing in the task of the teacher of mathematics, of science, of history — of all, in fact, whose aim is to encourage logical thinking. In this way the craft of

writing has a character all its own, since the tool and the intellectual process are one.

We may say, then, that the main business of the teacher of prose composition is to give training in the use of the mother tongue for the clear and orderly expression of thought. The exercises he prescribes must always involve something more than the mechanical manipulation of words. Even such a matter as punctuation requires a nice perception of the meaning behind sentence-structure. At every stage the pupil is learning to arrange facts and ideas in coherent form, to describe and expound clearly, and to state an argument forcibly. He is, in short, acquiring the intellectual equipment which the mastery of language implies.

✓ The teacher who succeeds in making his pupils write with real care for meaning and order will have the satisfaction of a job well done. If he sees in any of them the awakening of the creative imagination that transcends logic and clothes itself in beauty, he will rejoice. But he will also walk humbly, and strive not to stifle the tender plant by too much pedantic interference. ✓

SOME PRINCIPLES OF METHOD

With the qualification I have mentioned, it remains helpful to think of work in composition as practice in using the tool of language. If this practice is to be effective, there must be abundant material upon which the pupil can work. In other words, when he is asked to write a free composition, he should always have plenty to say. This might seem to be a truism. It is in fact a cardinal principle that is too often neglected. A survey of the composition subjects set in the older textbooks, and indeed in some of the newer ones, shows the authors' extraordinary ignorance of, or carelessness about what interests boys and girls, and what topics they can be reasonably expected to handle. ✓ It is the first business of the teacher of com-

position to find out what subjects really interest the members of his class (and it is remarkable how the interests of classes of the same age vary from year to year), and to give them the opportunity of writing about them. Boys and girls always have topics that they are anxious to talk about, and if they are asked to talk about them on paper, they will bring a lively interest to the work. The teacher who sees a pupil sitting idly and biting his pen in the vain hope of inspiration should in the first instance take himself to task.

But though boys and girls are voluble enough in certain directions, their interests are naturally narrow, so that the range of topics for composition to be drawn from their own experience is limited. All the time, however, their minds are being opened to new impressions and ideas through books. It is therefore most desirable that work in composition — especially in the earlier stages — should be linked with the study of literature. A book which is the focus of the common interest of the class provides abundant material for exercises in narrative, description, and discussion. From this point of view it is a mistake to discuss the teaching of composition in separation from the teaching of literature : the two go hand in hand.

If the pupils have no undue difficulty with the matter of their composition, they can be expected to give proper attention to the manner. It must be the constant aim of the teacher to encourage them to say what they have to say as well as possible — to develop in them the feeling for language. This is a task calling for both skill and persistence. A boy will readily produce two or three pages of writing of a sort on a subject he knows something about, but he is generally not easily convinced that it is worth while to take real trouble over expression, to weigh his words, to consider the form of his sentences, the correct placing of emphasis, and the smooth transition from one idea to another. As a means of encouraging care in expression it is a good plan to select from a batch of com-

positions two or three that are especially good in this respect and to read them to the class, calling attention to noteworthy points. A class is usually more impressed by the performance of one of its own members than by a model passage taken from a great writer. The same aim can be assisted by setting frequent short exercises — exercises, that is to say, requiring considerable thought though but little writing. Thus a class may be asked to write a single paragraph explaining as clearly as possible the central idea of a short story, or giving a sketch of a character in a play, or expanding an interesting idea that has cropped up in reading, or summarising the line of thought in a particular passage. If these exercises are regularly discussed by the teacher with the class, and the merits and defects of particular compositions pointed out, the pupils gradually come to realise the importance of quality as opposed to quantity in writing.

Older pupils will, of course, be given a criterion of good writing by the close study of selected passages of fine prose. Their attention will be called to such positive qualities as agreeable rhythm and effective sentence-pattern. Should such analysis of an author's style be accompanied by exercises in imitation? Inspired no doubt by the example of R. L. Stevenson's self-training in the literary craft through constant exercises in imitation of his favourite authors, some teachers advocate this method as suitable for classroom purposes. There are textbooks with ingenious exercises in the imitation of models, and I have known classes produce very creditable work of the kind. The method certainly has the merit of developing a feeling for words. On the whole, however, I do not believe that imitation is a sound way of forming the pupil's own style. This must grow naturally out of his own personality. He should be encouraged always to think first about subject matter, about the ideas he wants to convey. Let him think of style as a spontaneous excellence resulting from effective expression, and not as a decoration merely stuck

on.' The unfortunate results of a preoccupation with style as such are illustrated in Stevenson's own work : many of his essays are a pastiche of other people's writing rather than the sincere expression of important ideas urgently demanding utterance.

EXERCISES IN FREE COMPOSITION

Having discussed some general principles in the teaching of composition, we may proceed to consider particular types of exercises. It used to be customary for practice in composition to be confined to a weekly essay on a general subject (it was called an 'essay' whether it was a Sixth Form effusion or a simple narrative by a junior). It is very necessary that a class should do at least one piece of written work every week ; but, for reasons given elsewhere, it is highly desirable that it should often take the form of an answer to a question on the literature being read, or of an exercise on an appropriate technical point of composition.

In the lower and middle school extended compositions will be mainly of a narrative or descriptive character. Middle school pupils can begin to tackle the essay proper, for they are now developing the habit of reflection and the power of argument which this exercise requires. The place to be given to the formal essay has become a matter of some controversy. The omission of the essay from the tests prescribed by some of the examining bodies for the School Certificate will certainly cause a reduction in the time devoted to this kind of writing. It would seem, however, that the examining bodies are fighting shy of the essay not on educational grounds but because of the proved difficulty of fairly assessing the value of the candidates' work. (In view of the nature of the subjects frequently set, this difficulty is not surprising.) Essays may be hard to examine, but for all that they may provide very necessary training in composition. I know no better means than the

essay of teaching pupils how to organise facts and ideas in a coherent plan ; and I cannot think it will be a good thing to allow it to fall into neglect owing to changing examination requirements.

But if it is to achieve its purpose, the essay must be carefully handled. Above all, it should not be set too often — in the middle school perhaps not more than twice a term, and even in the upper school not much more frequently. The writing should be preceded by proper preparation. Except for the purposes of a test, it is altogether wrong to throw a subject — or half a dozen alternative subjects — to a class and leave them to get on with it. As I have already said, it is most important to ensure that the pupils have something to say. On most general subjects they need help not only in arranging facts and ideas but in actually assembling them. The teacher can talk about a topic (or topics) in class, or he can arrange a class-debate. When the subject matter has been prepared, he should get the class to co-operate in devising suitable methods of treatment. Pupils will, of course, be left free to choose any one of the alternative plans, or, if they wish, to follow their own devices. Without some sort of preliminary work such as this to ensure that the pupils write with a clear purpose in mind, I am sure that the exercise is shorn of much of its value.

Here let me plead that topics for school essays should always be clearly limited in scope. In setting a youngster to write on a one-word topic such as "Competition", "Music", "Trees", or "Newspapers", you are asking too much of him ; you are simply inviting him to flounder in a mass of incoherent commonplaces. (And if you are an examiner, you have only yourself to blame for the difficulty in assessing the result.) Give the pupil a subject such as "The Value of Competition in School Life" or "What the Wireless has done for Music", and he has a clear-cut problem to deal with. If he fails to produce a logical statement adequately meeting the requirements of

the title, he can be shown where he has gone wrong, and he can appreciate the extent of his failure.

There is much to be said for setting topical subjects for essays. Most pupils have some background of knowledge concerning the events and problems of the day : they have heard them discussed by their family or on the wireless, and have probably read about them in the newspaper. Their interest can be developed in a preliminary discussion, and they become eager to set out their own views on paper.

The great thing is to make a boy or girl want to write on a particular subject. I have found it useful to begin by reading to a class (especially of senior boys) an essay written by a well-known author and characterised by vivid description, amusing ideas, or provocative argument (for instance, J. B. Priestley's *Petticoat Lane*, Alpha of the Plough's *On being Tidy*, H. L. Mencken's *Zoos*). The boys are then required to attempt an essay on a similar theme ("A Cattle Market" or "An Auction", "On being Punctual", "In Defence of Zoos"). There is no suggestion that they should imitate the style of the author concerned ; in the case of Mencken's essay, indeed, they see almost without being told that the style should not be imitated. The purpose of the preliminary reading is to stimulate ideas, to show how a practised essayist can give life and colour to an ordinary theme, to foster the notion that an essay is not just a routine school exercise that has to be got through somehow, but a piece of work that can be done with interest and zest.

Before they reach the stage of the formal essay pupils will be writing compositions on narrative and descriptive subjects. Topics can be taken from home life, school life, recreation and hobbies, the cinema, and especially the literature read in class. The simplest exercises are the straightforward reproduction of a story (written either in the third person or from the point of view of one of the characters), and the imaginative account of an experience

suggested by an incident in a story. The opening of a story may be read to a class, and they may be asked to finish it in their own way. Children are usually very ready to make up a story to fit a given title. It has to be remembered, however, that the element of genuine invention in such exercises is often not great : both the incidents and the phraseology are largely remembered from favourite adventure books. Interesting results can be obtained by asking children to invent a tale similar in theme to one with which they are familiar. For instance, after reading Kenneth Grahame's *The Argonauts*, the class may write about another game of " Let's Pretend " in which the same characters take part. A reading from *Pickwick* concerning the unfortunate attempts of Mr. Winkle to ride a horse, to shoot, and to skate, may be followed by an account of how he might have behaved at a dance during the Christmas festivities at Manor Farm. Classes also enjoy compositions couched in the form of a newspaper report or wireless commentary.

Descriptive subjects vary considerably in difficulty. Quite young children can of course produce vivid accounts of exciting scenes such as a fire or a shipwreck which they have read about or seen in a film. They may need help, however, in describing everyday scenes and happenings, for the details are often not strongly impressed on their minds. In dealing with descriptive composition the teacher has the opportunity of introducing the idea of order in the presentation of the material ; he can make the class begin to distinguish between essentials and minor details. A picture can be used with advantage to provide subject matter for this kind of work. A picture that tells a story is also useful in suggesting a narrative composition.

As soon as they are ready for it, pupils should be introduced to the idea of the paragraph. The notion of the paragraph as a way of arranging facts according to topics can be grasped by pupils in the lowest forms. They see very clearly the need for this kind of division in the case

of a letter. Practice in writing letters is therefore valuable at this stage. Although the paragraphing of simple narrative or descriptive matter presents no great difficulty, the principles of paragraph-structure as applied to passages of exposition and argument need careful study. This should begin in the middle school when the pupils are developing the capacity to follow a logical train of thought. A good deal of work should be done from time to time in analysing the structure of selected paragraphs and — later on — in studying the means of effective transition of thought from paragraph to paragraph in a connected passage. Many suitable exercises are to be found in modern textbooks ; but the work can frequently be done best in connection with class literature. In the matter of handling the paragraph there is perhaps no better teacher than Macaulay.

At this point especially, training in composition becomes training in clear thinking. The growing ability to organise ideas in effective paragraphs linked in a coherent scheme is a mark of developing intellectual power. Until he has acquired something of this ability the pupil cannot tackle the formal essay successfully, nor can he indeed produce a convincing piece of writing of any kind requiring sustained explanation or argument. Imperfect paragraph-structure is the commonest fault among immature writers.

I proceed to mention one or two other types of exercises in free composition. The conversation (in narrative form) and the dialogue (in dramatic form) are very suitable for junior and middle school forms. These exercises may be based either on a specially invented incident or on an episode taken from literature. From a story that is being read a paragraph can be selected in which the author describes briefly in indirect form what certain characters did and said. The class may be asked to imagine and describe the scene in detail, giving the conversation in full in direct speech. A class that has read Tennyson's *The Revenge* may be asked to imagine that Lord Thomas Howard and Sir Richard Grenville met on board the flag-

ship in order to discuss the situation brought about by the arrival of the Spanish fleet, and to put the discussion into the form of a dialogue as for a scene in a play.

For middle and senior forms it is good practice to write a speech suitable for a class-debate, the object being to state an argument as forcibly as possible. As a variation of the same exercise, the teacher may read the class a challenging passage from an essay or article — preferably a passage stating ideas likely to provoke sharp disagreement ; they are then invited to write a concise and effective reply to the views expressed.

EXERCISES BASED ON THE UNDERSTANDING AND RE-STATEMENT OF IDEAS

It is obviously important for boys and girls who are going to become students or to enter any kind of professional employment to be trained to grasp the meaning of a written or spoken statement quickly and accurately, and, if necessary, to re-state the main points clearly and concisely. Exercises to this end are therefore an essential part of English work. Practice in summarising is also valuable as a means of assisting young writers to acquire facility in expression and precision in the use of words. The writer of a *précis* has his subject matter given him ; he can therefore concentrate his attention on the form of his composition.

Fourth and Fifth Forms commonly devote considerable time to *précis*-writing, especially in view of examination requirements. It is perhaps worth mentioning that summarising is a difficult exercise that should not be set to junior forms. The whole instinct of the very young writer is to expand. He revels in descriptive and dramatic details. To ask him to condense is to ask him to go against his nature.

The textbooks on composition generally contain plenty of material for *précis*. It is to be regretted, however, that

in many of them the selected passages are so imperfectly adapted to the interests and capacities of the young. It ought not to be necessary to say that a pupil should never be asked to summarise a passage that is beyond his understanding. In the most carefully selected passage there may be words or sentences likely to cause trouble : the teacher should clear up any difficulties in a preliminary talk. Particular expressions in a passage torn from its context can easily puzzle the immature mind. For this reason it is frequently best to take extracts from books being studied.

Paraphrasing in its various forms can be made an excellent means of developing command of language. Largely because of its manifest abuses, this exercise fell into disfavour some years ago and was severely frowned upon in the schools of pedagogy. The less enlightened schoolmasters of an older generation were apt to set classes to produce their halting prose renderings of fine passages of poetry which were only dimly understood. Obviously it is a crime to give a boy or girl the impossible task of putting a passage of lyrical rapture or inspired thought into other words. But there is plenty of verse in which the poet is not writing under full inspiration, and in which he is giving a description or stating ideas that can be not inadequately rendered in prose. The dissection of such passages will not blight a growing appreciation of poetry. It is good discipline to trace the line of thought faithfully from sentence to sentence, to ponder on the precise significance of words and phrases, to search for equivalent expressions to reproduce the meaning as closely as possible, and finally to polish the new rendering into an elegant piece of prose. Paraphrasing helps the pupil to discriminate between synonymous expressions and to appreciate idiom. As with summarising, it is of the first importance that he should fully comprehend the passage he is dealing with : serious difficulties should be explained before he starts.

Of course, paraphrasing need not be confined to verse.

A class studying prose literature of the eighteenth or nineteenth century will frequently come upon passages written in a difficult or outmoded style ; these are suitable for re-casting in simple modern English. Pupils who are reading Hakluyt or Pepys can be asked to modernise selected extracts. Senior forms can try their hand at simplifying examples of the Official English on which Mr. Churchill wages war. It is sometimes possible to present a class with a piece of bad English written by a foreigner. The attempt to turn it into good English will teach them a good deal about idiom. And this serves as a reminder that the practice of translation from a foreign language should be made a valuable contribution to training in English composition.

PUNCTUATION

It is desirable to add a few remarks on punctuation. The inability of boys and girls who have just left school to use stops correctly is a frequent cause of complaint. There are a few people who seem never to be able to learn to punctuate properly, just as there are some who never learn to spell. But among school pupils bad punctuation is due mainly to sheer carelessness. When challenged, a boy will tell you where he ought to have put stops ; he simply did not bother about it. The teacher's job, therefore, is to impress on him that the correct insertion of stops is not a mere formality, but is of real importance in elucidating meaning. The setting of numerous special textbook exercises on punctuation does not necessarily achieve this object. Boys are quite capable of working such exercises perfectly correctly one day, and the next day producing an essay showing no attention to stops. It is a case for dogged persistence on the part of the teacher in dealing with all the written work he receives.

The textbooks set out elaborate rules of punctuation, which should no doubt be mastered at some time. As

these rules are based on grammatical principles, the theory of the use of a particular stop is best dealt with when the relevant point arises in the grammar lesson. It will be found useful to collect and systematise the rules of punctuation in the Fifth Form.

Actually most children acquire the ability to punctuate not so much by the study of set rules as by observation and imitation. They develop correct habits almost unconsciously. For this reason the teacher is wise not to devote too much time to formal rules ; it is better to spend a few minutes now and then in discussing particular points in pupils' composition as occasion serves, and in calling attention to examples in the use of certain stops as they are met with in reading.

With younger children teaching should be confined for the most part to the full stop and the comma (and, of course, the punctuation of direct speech). They seldom construct sentences of their own in which a semi-colon or colon would be needed, and they cannot be expected to understand the theory of the use of these stops until they have acquired some knowledge of the nature of complex, double, and multiple sentences.

THE STUDY OF VOCABULARY AND IDIOM

Increasing skill in composition demands a widening of vocabulary and a developing control of idiomatic expression. The study of words and their ways thus has a direct bearing on work in composition. It is particularly necessary in the case of pupils coming from homes that provide little in the way of cultural background. Such children often make their only contact with the literary language through the school (apart from private reading). For them especially, but not only for them, systematic work with the dictionary is needed throughout the school course. The study of words should arise out of the literature lesson. From time to time a story or essay or chapter

of a novel should be examined from the point of view of the meaning and use of words. The class should look up the difficult words in a dictionary, and should give meanings that will fit the sentences in which they occur. It is most important that the words should be studied in their context ; the mere making of a vocabulary list is of little value. It is often better to ask for the meaning of a whole phrase than of a single word. In a subsequent exercise the class can be required to use some of the words in sentences so as to bring out the meanings. Many mistakes will inevitably be made, even if the words have been thoroughly discussed. When the exercises are returned, the teacher should clear up the misunderstandings, especially those which arise from the confusion of synonyms. Vocabulary work requires patience and skill, but it is rewarding in its results.

VII

THE STUDY OF PROSE

BY AGNES M. C. LATHAM

PROSE means matter, information conveyed, and manner, the way of conveying it. It means nearly all writing, most speaking, and a good deal of conscious thinking. It extends far beyond the boundaries of the English classroom, and when a child leaves school he will owe the manner of his thinking, speaking, and writing to a very great many persons besides his English teacher. And yet it is in a special way the English teacher's concern. The classes before him are extremely diverse, for both the gifted and the dull attend school, both boys and girls, and when they leave some of them may read and write for their living, and others may read or write in their spare time, and there are others who will not even read, let alone put pen to paper. But none of them can possibly avoid having to understand and manipulate prose, and in the hour or the two hours which the time-table puts at his disposal for this purpose, the teacher of English must try to guide and assist every one of them.

Fortunately he has allies, and one of the strongest is habit. It is a fact which anyone can test for himself and on himself, that the more good stuff one reads, the less patience one has with bad, and the more bad stuff one reads, the less patience one has with good. It is true that ardent readers go through a period when they will read anything and that there are phases of adolescent taste for which one blushes in retrospect, and yet no great harm is done. None the less I cannot bring myself to believe that it really doesn't matter what anyone reads provided he reads something. If, in the omnivorous period, chance

were to throw good books in his way, he would be immensely more fortunate than if, still by chance, they were bad. In the English lesson, at any rate, chance is not in charge.

A child takes a great step forward when he acquires the art of silent reading, and once he is capable of taking home a book and mastering it himself it may seem waste of precious time to set aside school periods for reading merely. Do the class, by reading aloud and sharing a book, gain anything that might not equally well be gained in private study? Do they not actually lose? Reading aloud is a slow business at best, and the rapid readers could get through several books in the time that it takes the class together to read one. Moreover it is almost impossible to select a book which will appeal equally to thirty people at once. If the teacher reads, he appears either to be doing all the work, or in another light, not to be doing enough to earn his pay. If the children read, they read so badly that a period set aside for lively pleasure becomes an intolerable bore.

In spite of all these objections, I feel that a factor so potent in out-of-school education should not be banished from the classroom (though one wishes sometimes that it need not have a formal classroom setting). Mother reads to child, elder child to younger, Miss Jenkyns reads passages from *The Rambler* and Captain Brown retorts with Boz. The reading of a serial story on the wireless strips libraries and bookshops of the works of an author of whose existence apparently the general public was previously almost unaware. And in the prison camps of Burma exhausted men fling themselves down in the evening, anywhere — provided they are within earshot of the man with the book.

The fact that the children read in class does not, after all, prevent their reading at home. It encourages them by stimulating interest in books in general, and in the works of the selected author in particular. Moreover, there is something infectious about a shared enjoyment,

so much so that the individuals to whom the book makes no special appeal, are none the less drawn into the magic circle. Books read communally may, perhaps always ought, to be a little harder than the majority of listeners could tackle alone and unaided. Comment, if there should be comment, and discussion, which there surely will be, are easier when everyone is at the same place in the same book at the same time.

It is practice, too, in reading aloud ; but it is emphatically not the lesson in which the children *learn* to read. Possibly they are not very good readers. In that case the teacher must do the bulk of the work until they improve (and if anybody thinks it easy, let him try). He need not be superlatively good. Our best actors are not our best scholars, and it would be absurd to demand that all English teachers should be dramatic readers of real merit. Many are, and most are adequate, which is what chiefly matters. They understand and appreciate the book. A proportion of their listeners don't, *until it is read to them by someone who does*. If the book has its unendurable *longeurs*, the reader can skip them ; if it has its difficulties, he can elucidate. But just as the lesson must not become a reading lesson, neither must it be any sort of *lecture expliquée*. There is a place for that elsewhere. The flow of the story is what matters, and the only permissible comment is that which contributes to a shared enjoyment. At the end of the lesson the books are collected and impounded till the next time, or the enthusiasts will finish the tale the same night. Nobody, note, is preventing them from finishing another book of their own choosing that night. At half term even the dullest are sufficiently enthralled to want to finish by themselves. Then class time can be used for something else — to begin another book, for instance.

Ideally, of course, the children should take their fair share in the reading. No child ought to leave school unable to read a piece of prose so as to be audible, com-

prehensible, and if possible agreeable. There is nothing your good reader likes better than reading to the rest, and a surprisingly large number of indifferent readers seem to derive a forlorn satisfaction from it. But the pleasure and interest in the selected narrative must come before everything else, however tempting it may be to kill several birds with one stone. If the teacher spends forty-five minutes reading himself, without even a word of comment, it is still a good lesson and well worth his while. If half the class are sitting with their fingers in their ears, trying to read page sixty, while a couple of their more inept comrades struggle through page sixteen, and the teacher chases the remotest allusion to its source, I will not say no one profits, but that it might as well be changed into a silent reading period, while the teacher gets on with some marking.

Unless the book was very ill-selected, the children have enjoyed it. The dullest child cannot complain that he 'got stuck'. And if they enjoyed it, then they must up to a point have understood and appreciated it, for enjoyment demands understanding. What else have they gained? It depends partly on the book, but one thing they have certainly acquired, and that is the makings of a wider vocabulary. It is a mistake to suppose that we gain a vocabulary from the dictionary. Dictionaries are excellent compilations, both informative and entertaining, but the learner wants to study words in action, not words in pickle. It is not enough to know what a word means; you must know how to use it, and you will only learn that by watching other people use it, which is, after all, the natural way of acquiring a word-sense. We are often urged to train children to refer to the dictionary. Far more useful to the majority of them would be training in guessing rightly from the context. For though that is the most natural and least drudging way to learn how words behave, plenty of people are too lazy to do even that, without a little encouragement and prodding from

behind. I know it has its dangers. I know also why teachers of a foreign language detest nothing so much as pocket dictionaries in the hands of novices. The older the student, the more desirable the dictionary method, but it still does not oust the other. Indeed, the larger dictionaries are at special pains to display the word in action.

The matter does not stop at vocabulary. The listeners, even the inattentive, are learning not only the meaning of words, but the whole framing and phrasing of sentences, different ways of saying things. They are becoming familiar with the methods by which accomplished writers solve the problems of their difficult and necessary art. If the prose set before them is graded in difficulty, they should be slowly gaining in the power to interpret harder and harder sayings, and at the same time, when they come to solve similar problems themselves (both in thought, in speech, and in writing), they have models to hand. The child is naturally imitative. He hasn't even to be bidden to imitate. He can hardly be prevented. Set good prose before him and he will set good prose before you. (The same principle applies to material. Offer young children dear little elves and funny bunnies and you will get elves and bunnies back again. Substitute Robin Hood and *Heroes of Asgard* and they will substitute a wholesome, generous roystering, or a shadowy touch of the high epic manner. It is easiest to illustrate the point with young children, but it goes much deeper.)

I am not suggesting for one moment that you give a young child a page of fine writing and ask him to write a page like it. That is an exercise which, if it has value at all, has value only in senior forms, where there may be a place for the conscious imitation of a given style, for parody, pastiche, and "playing the sedulous ape". It is, after all, the way many writers have owned that they learnt their craft. Applied too early, such performances are likely to foster what is, in any case, a quite sufficiently

serious vice in secondary schools. I mean the capacity that the pupils — the girl pupils at any rate — show for writing fluent nonsense. There is an ease, a grace, a spurious maturity about it, but the thought is trivial and inconsequent, there is everything in the manner and nothing in the matter. The point from which the learner must attack the problem of expression is from having something to express. It may be due to an urgent and personal desire, or it may be simply because his teacher wills it, but the question of *how* must always take second place in comparison with the question of *what*. Grant the matter there, and the urge, the young writer looks about him for some help as to method, and the greatest help he can find is in watching others more experienced than he. The teacher's part is to see that the examples are there and are suited to the child's capacity. The invitation to follow them need not, in fact should not, be either pressing or crude. The members of the class will avail themselves of the prop you negligently lay within reach only so far as they need it. If they can do without it altogether so much the better ; but nobody can be born into a world which has been for centuries at work beating prose into a competent medium of expression, and expect to devise an entirely new instrument for himself. We must all accept our inheritance, and the channels along which we think, speak, and write are hollowed by the same genius that has shaped our communal English tongue.

With this in mind, the teacher, the whole range of English prose literature before him, is required to select models of graded difficulty whose excellence shall be of a kind suited to the age and ability of the children before whom they will be set. The issue is apt to be a little fogged by the feeling that, as in reading lessons, two birds can be killed by one stone, and in this case the works studied shall not only be good fodder for young minds but shall also be great works of literature in their own right. There is a very real problem here, for if, in the formative years,

we are giving the child examples of prose upon which, only half-consciously and following a natural process by which our minds grow, he will model his own, we are surely wrong when we place before him stylists of the calibre of Bacon, Addison, and Lamb. For there is only one Bacon, only one Addison, and only one Lamb in the whole history of English and they are inimitable. Moreover they are adults, writing for adults. And the idiom of even the most recent is the idiom of a hundred years ago. Finally, they are essayists, and the child is not, and (according to some modern notions) should not try to be.

All these objections seem to me to have great weight, and no scheme of English reading should be made without facing them fairly. I did not choose the three names I mentioned at random, but because I think they afford very special support to my theory, since in skill and in maturity of mind they far surpass anything a child could hope to accomplish. At the same time I have known all three successfully used to achieve exactly the end I had in mind, when I said that the child learns by imitating good models. I have been able to tell a class whom I had not previously taught what they had been reading the term before. It was Bacon's *Essays* and I knew by the way they began their own. I have met a class who had been reading Addison and who had invented most entertaining clubs of their own and contributed papers which, in their small way, had something of the urbanity and formal grace of the original. The first chapter of *David Copperfield* is an excellent starting place for a child's own recollections of early life, and Lamb's story of Great-Grandmother Field will transform a commonplace essay on summer holidays. Reading every week the stories of King Arthur and re-telling them for home-work in a sprawling unformed hand was how I learnt myself to master sentences when they were at their most untractable, and I have never yet been able to think of a better way.

Nevertheless, as a diet for the dull and unliterary (and

there are many of them, call them by what name you please) something is surely needed which falls more within their own range. It is wrong that so very much of what we set before children is in language not only of another generation, but of another century. They have the mental and emotional outlook of today, if not of tomorrow, they hear the speech of today, they read the trivia and ephemera of today, and we bring them up on the prose of the eighteen-hundreds. To them Mr. Pickwick is as much a historical character as Henry Esmond, and they will hardly be weaned from the slick talk of gunmen by the interminable disquisitions of Gurth and Wamba. There is a danger, of course, in the opposite extreme ; of setting before them, for instance, things which are not even good in their kind, of lowering standards or losing standards altogether, of broadening and easing a way which will lead to destruction. There is also a very great practical problem, in that publishers do not supply good contemporary books in the form and at the price that makes them available for schools. Some of the battle is already won, but the choice is not nearly wide enough, and even with the most willing co-operation between school and publisher there are serious difficulties.

Not only are there not enough good modern books to be had, the books in general which are selected for the English course are apt to be too exclusively literary. Certainly the English teacher is a teacher of literature. If he doesn't teach it, nobody else will, and there is much to be said in favour of reading essays, short stories, novels, and plays. I should like to say a good deal in defence of the novel as a book to be studied in school. It is a picture of life ; a window through which the adolescent can view the adult world, and if it is a good novel it is a good picture of life. It shows thought and feeling and action, places and periods and societies, manners and morals and human relationships. It is, in fact, a most informative kind of book ; particularly for girls, in whom nature has planted

a deep concern with the lives of other people. When a girl leaves school, novels will probably form the major part of her reading, and long after she has left she will base her ideas of life on what she finds in them. If school has trained her taste they will be reliable guides.

Why, when the obvious advantages of the novel are recognised — “with a tale, forsooth, he cometh to you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney-corner” — is more use not made of biography and autobiography? They have certain advantages that the novel has not. There is a need for the purpose and order and seemly formality of fiction, for its ardour, its ecstasies, and its bird’s-eye and god’s-eye view. There should also be a place for the harsh, the sober, the inevitable and unexpected fact. Fiction is the flame of the imagination burning; fact is the fuel for the imagination to consume. There are diaries and letters as well, but perhaps these are too mature and personal to have much appeal, though senior forms should be equal to them. It would be worth trying whether the recent fashion for childhood memories has any charm for people whose childhood is not far behind them. There is a perennial fascination in what it was like when father was a little boy or when grandmother was a girl. Natural history would come high on the list; Gilbert White, W. H. Hudson, and Richard Jefferies are only a few names, actually published at a moderate price; travel books — *Eöthen*, *South with Scott*, *Travels with a Donkey*, which are already part of our English stock, and many more; country life and landscape, one of our most modern genres; and for the technically minded, good technical books, perhaps the hardest to find, but worth searching for.

Isn’t it sufficient to place books such as these in the school library? No, I think not, though at 8s. 6d. a copy that will be the only place to find them. Is there time for modern authors and for a fair review of the more time-honoured classics as well? Possibly not; but there

already seems to be a feeling that a literary course should be a matter for choice and not be thrust willy-nilly on everyone. Meanwhile those with no strong bent for literature none the less need food for thought (they often have minds) and for imagination (they have that, too). The teacher is in no way bound to introduce the child to the best of our literature, just because it is the best, and to think, if the child gains nothing by the contact, that it is nobody's fault and that no time has been wasted. By concentrating on the slow widening of mental horizons he is far more likely in the end to turn out a pupil capable of enjoying Lamb or Walter Pater, than if he started with the idea that it was his duty to see that no child left his care without having read *The Essays of Elia* or *Appreciations*. Moreover, supposing at the end of it all the pupil doesn't enjoy Lamb or Pater, is that very odd or very regrettable? — provided, at least, he doesn't despise or detest them, through having been forcibly introduced to them at the wrong time, and does enjoy other writers who are good and even excellent in their kind.

So far, I have dealt with reading in a wide general way, a book at a gulp, which is the way one normally reads. But nothing is easier than for such reading to generate lazy mental habits, in both teacher and pupil, and as well as wide reading the school child needs a course of close study, where one extract is dealt with at a time and dealt with thoroughly. The extent to which children fail in comprehension, and acquiesce in their failure, has to be seen to be believed. An extract — one paragraph or ten — is no substitute for a book, nor do prose miscellanies serve the same end as poetic. After all, the poems are printed whole, and there is no such thing as a prose lyric. Prose suffers severely by being removed from its context and presented in bleeding (and often purple) gobbets. It is extraordinary how much one's appreciation of a favourite passage depends upon one's knowledge of the whole book from which it comes. None the less, the brief extract has

its uses, and the miscellany has the great advantage of being able to quote from a very wide field and offer not only literary prose of all descriptions, but all kinds of technical matter too. There are many such publications, and it is to be hoped there will be many more, better and better ones.

One has, of course, no guarantee that a child, trained by close study to extract the last ounce of meaning from a given passage, will apply similar methods outside the English classroom. It is one of those things that can degenerate into a trick. The most important thing to remember is that the ordinary lesson is not a test, it is a training. Questions to test comprehension of a set passage of prose or verse are very common in examinations (and very hard to grade because the range of intelligent comment is so great). In the lesson the teacher is not testing so much as exploring and explaining. It is easy to raise the standard of accuracy very considerably by this kind of exercise. The child who makes quick, careless, incomplete answers is convicted very promptly by what even he eventually admits that the printed page conveys, and he soon learns to look before he speaks. The questions must always be set with a constructive purpose. They can easily become nattering and futile. The work put into this period of intensive study pays for the unstinted enjoyment of the general reading period. They are complementary.

Précis is a very similar exercise. It is, in the same way, a favourite examination test, but if it is the subject of weekly study, it must be with some other end in view than mere testing — of what? Something, apparently, that requires no teaching time. In précis two birds do really fall to one stone, and the twofold aspects of prose-study — comprehension and expression — are united (with imagination for the moment under strict control, which will do it no harm). Like *lecture expliquée* the whole business can become very arid and unprofitable if it is undertaken

as an end in itself. Children don't make a *précis* for the sake of making a *précis*, but to gain a mental grasp of facts stated and implied in a given piece of prose, and to exercise their powers of expressing — not anything their wayward and often languid fancy chooses, but a definite nexus of facts and ideas that there is no dodging. Since the value of this work is frequently far from apparent to the students engaged on it, and the matter supplied is often very dull, it may be as well sometimes to introduce it in a form less purely academic than the usual classroom *précis*. I wonder sometimes whether people who apply to a child the very common intelligence-test of "Recount the plot of any story or film which you have recently seen and enjoyed" — realise that they are asking for a fairly stiff piece of *précis*, and that when they follow it up with the seeming-innocent enquiry "and say why you liked it", they are asking for an even more difficult and advanced piece of literary criticism.

For the most part children *feel* style. They can't easily talk about it and they don't particularly want to hear anybody else talk about it. From senior classes it is not unreasonable, however, to ask for some critical appreciation, always bearing in mind that appreciation and comprehension go hand in hand. The exercise of the critical faculty is one of the most powerful factors in the mind's maturing, and can be very exciting. Applied in schools to prose, it is an art that the French appear to have developed more successfully than we. Just as, in verse, a child tends to admire first a marked rhythm and a gorgeous vocabulary, so in prose it is the poetic or strongly dramatic element which first appeals to a growing critical sense. It would be very difficult, I think, to induce a conscious appreciation of a plain and easy style, though that is precisely the style one wishes to encourage. There is a danger that when attention is centred on the ornate and emotional, the child will come to look upon 'fine writing' and good writing as the same thing. Most art,

however, progresses from the elaborate to the simple, not the other way. A child's ear is soon captured by a sounding phrase ; " reached his destination " for instance, seems to give supreme satisfaction, judged by the number of times it occurs, and it is perilously easy to substitute *commence* for *begin*, *purchase* for *buy*, and *obtain* for *get*. In spite of a defensive mechanism, whereby polysyllables are considered innately humorous, young people secretly revel in those that they have at their command. This is perhaps particularly the case with boys. A girl is by nature less assertive and gains a little earlier the social tact that tells her when language is over-dressed. It is only fair to the novice to remember that to him there is no such thing as cliché. It is all fresh ; and those to whom it is also astonishing and delightful are probably the very ones who will later become the most fastidious and exacting. To force austerity too early will only serve to convince the young enthusiast that you and he are never going to see eye to eye, and you will lose his confidence and some of his respect.

At the opposite extreme of prose enjoyed sensuously as poetry, is the use of prose books for information purely, the whole question of the reference book. It is argued that it is for reference chiefly that the ordinary person turns, or should turn, to books. This is clearly a highly practical line to pursue, but it is not easy to perfect a technique for dealing with large classes, and without a good school library it is hardly possible. Précis and dictionary work which have long been part of the English syllabus are obvious first steps, including that kind of précis which asks for a digest in the form of orderly notes. This leads up to a range of more or less directed activity which often goes by the name of 'research'. It is a training in initiative and self-reliance, and promises great things. It also makes great demands upon the teacher, who is fortunate if he has the time, skill, and energy with which to meet them. It may lead to superficiality and become simply a game to

be played at, much cry and little wool. There is, however, no doubt that the shared activities of the classroom require a counterbalance of private study, in which the helpless may stand on their own feet, the docile learn to walk without a leader, and the individualists can follow their fancy. The book that all enjoy together is a great treat, but the book that you discover for yourself alone is a rare treasure. We can all of us remember school periods that we did not employ in quite the way the time-table suggested ; directions that we did not precisely follow ; by-ways which we obstinately preferred to the beaten track. And these were by no means the least profitable part of our school days. No teacher can possibly be so universally sympathetic that his pupils need nothing that falls outside the range of his personal taste and capacity. There should be periods when nothing comes between the student and a well and variously stocked book-shelf — not even the termly confession exacted in a ‘ reading list ’.

As I have been writing I have been continually conscious of the fact that prose is everybody’s business, and perhaps the literary specialist has been, of all types, the one that I have least considered. Nothing that I have proposed should be to his disadvantage and he has at any rate the power to help himself. There are very many people, on the other hand, who in the common sense of the term are not literary at all, who none the less have a real feeling for prose style. English lessons have failed if they have offered them nothing and had nothing from them. There is a right and a wrong way of doing everything. Ordering one’s words well is like choosing one’s tie well, wearing one’s clothes well, giving the right change, and driving on the left. It is a social necessity ; and in his heart everyone longs to be at ease with his own language.

VIII

SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS IN ENGLISH

By GUY BOAS

THE question of examinations is a thorny one, and no aspect of it bristles with sharper thorns than the examining of English. In the first place it has been found difficult to determine what English for this purpose is precisely to be. While the Universities still contend as to how much of their examination syllabuses are to be devoted to language, philology, phonetics, and literature, schools are still unsettled as to the respective claims of literature and of formal English, *e.g.* *précis*, paraphrase, analysis, and grammar.

On the whole it is agreed that formal English is a reasonable subject for questions, or at least that it is reasonably easy to set questions upon it (though not necessarily as easy to answer them). But battles rage as to whether or not paraphrase is an incitement to the murdering of masterpieces, it is questioned whether such prehistoric animals as *synecdoche* or *oxymoron* should still figure among figures of speech, analysis is regarded by many as a monstrous perversion of the crossword puzzle, while recently even the apparently harmless essay has been mysteriously attacked as a pretentious vehicle for the thoughts of youth.

In the case of school examinations in literature the conflict is waged on both sides with almost religious fanaticism. One camp maintains that to examine school pupils in literature is a form of literary prostitution, the other holds that to abandon such examinations is to invite anarchy and annihilation. The former say that if you examine John and Mary in Shakespeare, you will so disgust them with the plays of that otherwise attractive author

that they will never read or witness a Shakespeare play again. To set questions on Shelley or even Addison is to kill the soul. To allow examiners to enquire if you happen to know whether Dickens was a Victorian or an Elizabethan is an affront to art, which the pupil will avenge as soon as he leaves school by burning his copy of *The Pickwick Papers* : while for teachers to attempt to assist their pupils in understanding the meaning of *The Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*, or the *Ode to Duty* or *St. Joan*, is to brand teachers and examiners as pedants, intent on killing the souls of the pupils and also the otherwise immortal works of Messrs. Chaucer, Wordsworth, and Shaw.

The opponents of this view are equally alarmed on the grounds that if you abolish examining in literature, you will at worst kill the subject completely, and at best reduce it to the status of a Cinderella to be ignored and despised for ever. While the ugly sisters, Latin and Mathematics, continue to reap rewards at the examination ball, Cinderella, who can help nobody to pass the fairy portals to lucrative employment, will be lucky if she is vouchsafed one hour a week upon the time-table. Moreover, if there is to be no more examining, the priceless moral asset of discipline will have gone. No examination, no work, they argue. Both teacher and taught will throw industry to the winds, and settling down to a Lotus-eating paradise, will dwindle during the literature lesson from vigorous and purposeful beings into hedonistic drones who regard the literature of England as a tiresome means of wasting time.

Clearly both these views, pushed to extremes, are nonsense. Indeed more rubbish is talked about English examinations than about most aspects of education, which is saying a good deal. Both arguments, nevertheless, contain a modicum of truth, and though sanity lies in finding a course between them, the maintenance of that balance is by no means easy.

The limitations inherent in all written examinations particularly emphasise themselves in the case of literature.

The basic difficulty is to examine on the *spirit* of literature, which is the heart of the matter. Too great emphasis tends to be placed on the bones of the subject, on plots, references and allusions, on mere memory work, on points verbal or metrical, which are only technical details, and indeed on details of all kinds which are often of quite subsidiary importance or wholly irrelevant. Works are easy or hard to examine on irrespective of their intrinsic value. *Absalom and Achitophel*, because of its wealth of allusion, is much more examinable than the *Morte d'Arthur*; *A Christmas Carol* on account of its brevity than *David Copperfield*; *The Grammarian's Funeral* because of its difficulty than *Corinna Goes a-Maying*, the pellucid clarity of which eludes the examiner like a sunbeam. The very fact that Shakespeare in his universal perfection provides even an ideal field for questioning is a snare. So easy is it to set questions such as paraphrase, context, and allusion on Shakespeare, on plot and analysis of character, that the examiner is tempted to overlook to what degree the pupil has or has not appreciated the ethereal genius of *The Dream* or *The Tempest*, the horror of *Lear*, the tragedy apart from the melodrama of *Macbeth*; the English glory, apart from the mere history in *Henry IV*, whether the pupil has understood Falstaff or only Worcester, Caliban or only Alonso.

Many of the finest English lyrics almost defy examination completely — the only thing to do with them is to read them. What profitable questions can be set on the songs from *The Princess*? It is the same with many elegies: *Lycidas* will abide some questions, but what is there really to ask about *Adonais* (assuming they know he is Keats), or about the incomparable *Scholar Gipsy* or *Thyrsis*? Modern contemporary poems are the hardest of all. Unless one is to fall back on questions related to the technical obscurities of T. S. Eliot and his school, a book of modern verse may produce a paper either so simple that it is no test at all, or so difficult that the teachers (as happened in a recent School Certificate instance) are as baffled as the pupils.

But this is the dark side of the picture. It does not mean that literature cannot be examined : only that it is a hard problem how to do so. Yet it is a problem which it is essential to solve, for the supporters of the examination are right in maintaining that if literature is excluded from School Certificate or from the Higher School and Intermediate examinations, while other subjects are retained, the doom of English literature as a subject in schools is sealed. This is not an academic question but one of economics and human nature. These examinations are the gateway to earning one's living. If literature earns no marks to assist one through that gate, let idealists, theorists, and educationalists prate as they will, common-sense parents and children will have none of it, and head masters and head mistresses will find difficulty (even with their consciences) in affording time worth mentioning in the curriculum for this — literally — unpaying subject. If the present form of examination should one day be abolished in all subjects, and a brain-wave should substitute some better test, then let literature go with the others : but that day and that brain-wave have shown no signs up to the present of arriving.

The initial necessity is the selection of prescribed books which are *really suitable to the candidates*. Examinations without set books are apt to be farcical, resulting in superficial guess-work, the cramming of who-wrote-what-and-when, with no reading of the books themselves, and a study of Shakespeare confined to the *Tales* of Lamb. In such general papers it has been said "as the examiner has not the slightest idea what the pupil has read and the pupil has not the slightest idea what the examiner will ask, the campaign proceeds upon territory of such unlimited dimensions that it is exceedingly difficult for either combatant to encounter the other at all".

Let reading be as free, wide, and unprescribed as possible during the years previous to the Certificate, but in the examination year the field must be limited to

definite books. The only persons equipped to choose these books are school teachers who really know the fodder suited to their flock. The examination is vitiated from the start if books are set by persons who know too much about the subject and too little about the pupils. What average English boy or girl should have their English test focussed on the shorter poems of Milton, the intangible beauties of Shelley or Keats, or the less inspired moments of Wordsworth? Surely it is possible to find prose works less dry to the young than the Essays of Addison, less unsuitable than Hugh Walpole's *Cathedral*, or a play of Shakespeare's more attractive than *Coriolanus*. (Yet all these have been included in the canon.) It takes practical experience, and a psychological grasp of youth to know that while *Lycidas* and the *Nativity Ode* cut no ice, *Paradise Lost*, Books I and II, with their superb drama, martial tumult, Parliamentary oratory, and Satanic panache, are ideal for the young : to know how much more suitable *Henry IV*, Part I, is than *As You Like It*, or *Eöthen* than *The Spectator*.

"Poems for young people," said a distinguished head master of a famous public school after a lifetime of experience, "should contain an objective story." This is perhaps limiting the field unduly, but it is a valuable hint.

Far more time and thought should be expended on this choosing of books. Ingenuity and resource are needed, and above all, sympathy with the young. Even given the right book, the invention of the right type of question is not easy. Questions should not be too hard, as too often is the case. "To ask Jones minor (bent on entering the Air Force) to discuss whether Milton's images depend less on what they directly represent than on what they remotely suggest is to invite either charlatanism or despair." The ideal question at the Certificate stage should discover whether the candidates have understood the action of the book, such psychology in the characters as, *at the candidates' age*, they can be expected to understand for themselves (not at second hand), and how far they appreciate the

spirit, style, and atmosphere of the work, again in accordance with such aesthetic perception as nature is likely to have developed in them at this stage — perceptions more sensitive and acute than the unknowing usually realise, granted the right type of book is being studied. Young pupils are often better able to understand Caliban or Scrooge than many adults : but they ought not to be expected to grasp for themselves the sophisticated, worldly-stained protagonists of *The Cathedral* or the cynical and licentious prelates of Robert Browning.

For Higher Schools a wider mental outlook may be expected. But even here *The Rape of the Lock* is more suitable than *Hyperion* and *St. Joan* than Shelley's *Prometheus*.

There are two factors in the problem, English literature and English children, and unless the two are related by someone who understands both, the examining of the latter in the former is unsatisfactory. If, however, the books and the pupils are properly related and the right type of questions set, all should be well.

Examining in formal English is less controversial, as all agree that it is desirable, whatever line a pupil is to follow when he leaves school, that he should be able to express himself on paper. The nature of the test, however, is a matter of opinion.

Why public opinion has moved recently against the essay is not clear. It is true that the writing of perfect essays requires a mature master both of style and of living. But because a school pupil is not a Montaigne, a Stevenson, or a Max Beerbohm, is no reason why he should not be allowed to express his thoughts in that medium which gives fullest scope for the writer to show, not what he does not know, but what he does, in which excessive knowledge of a subject is a handicap rather than an asset, and in which personality is more easily and appropriately given scope to reveal itself than in any other form of composition.

Précis is so generally admitted to be a satisfactory exercise that it is often the only compulsory question in a

paper. Who can deny that one should understand what one reads, and who can understand what he reads unless he is capable of condensing the essentials into *précis* form? The same applies to paraphrase. It is true that paraphrasing results in a less finished or inspired article than the original, but like *précis*, it ensures comprehension and, anyway, as a commonsense teacher remarked, "If you set a paper, you have to ask something."

Analysis of sentences and clauses is a much more dubious practice. Here we leave all pretence of literature for the realm of pseudo-mathematics and arbitrary brain-twisting. A little analysis does no harm, but it gives opportunity, unfortunately, for a certain type of teacher, too indolent or insensitive to teach real English, to concentrate unduly on this arid item, and by spending far too much time on it, to give it an importance out of all proportion to its value. The time would far better be spent on instructing the pupils how to write natural letters (free from clichés, facetiousness, and slang), how to address recipients correctly, and when not to end a letter "Your obedient servant" — which is usually not true, and certainly not graceful.

The teaching and examining of grammar is a subject more complex than can be treated adequately in a short space. The elements of English grammar are a necessary prelude to the writing of English; but as soon as English grammarians take us beyond the elements they are apt to apply grammatical terms proper to dead languages (where grammar *can* be fixed and made finite) to the living and everchanging organism of English, where such terms can only be used metaphorically, and where any new writer who has sufficient genius to command attention, is liable to throw overboard the grammarian's rules with impunity. For who shall determine in English grammar what is Greenwich time? The Ten Commandments include no injunction against taking a preposition to end one's sentence with. Shakespeare, writing before grammar

was beaten into its eighteenth-century mould, broke almost every grammatical rule, and who can say that another Shakespeare may not arise to free us from eighteenth-century bondage? Arnold Bennett maintained that he would undertake in twenty published pages of any modern English prose to show the so-called rules of our grammar refuted. Rather than stressing rules of 'right' and 'wrong', the business of the examiner in formal English is to find whether the candidate can express himself, as he is expected to do in after life, lucidly, pleasantly, and in good taste. Like the teacher and the pupil he should remember that the study of formal English and the study of English literature are not two different subjects, but one subject with a common object. The purpose of both is to equip English boys and girls to express themselves to the best of their ability in their own tongue, and to understand the expression of others. To this end the reading of our incomparable literature is a matchless inspiration, allied to whatever other interests the teacher can arouse. For it is interest which sets the pens of young writers flowing, and not grammatical and analytical rules, which for the most part only act as brakes. Interest and enthusiasm are the petrol which drives the car.

The responsibility of examiners is great. They must remember that though no good teacher will allow the examination to play too great a part in his teaching, he is bound to aim in the direction whence examination points. It is no exaggeration to say that the whole future of the teaching of English in schools, its very existence indeed as a school subject, depends on the sanity and enlightenment with which examining bodies do their work.

It may therefore be of interest to comment on a number of questions selected from a fairly wide survey, which includes papers set of recent years for School Certificate by London University, the Northern Joint Board, the Central Welsh Board, the University of Durham, the University of Bristol, and the Oxford and Cambridge School Certificate.

THE ESSAY

It is a relief to find among the usual stereotyped essay subjects the two following imaginative and appropriate choices :

- (1) Myself—ten years hence. (Central Welsh Board.)
- (2) The chief rules of either cricket, or football (either code), or hockey, or netball, explained in simple language for the benefit of a foreign friend who is ignorant of the game. (Central Welsh Board.)

FORMAL ENGLISH

The following is an attractive and distinguished question, showing the examiner to be as alive as the candidates are expected to be :

The following are translations of foreign proverbs.
Select five and express the meaning in other terms.

- (1) God gives almonds to some who have no teeth.
- (2) The cockroach is never in the right where the fowl is concerned.
- (3) In time grass becomes milk.
- (4) If the prince wants an apple, his servants take the tree.
- (5) Good bargains empty the purse.
- (6) A golden bit does not make the horse any better.
- (7) Never let the bottom of your purse or of your mind be seen.
- (8) You can tie a broken cord together, but there will be a knot in it.

(Northern Joint Board)

The freshness of this question should stimulate candidates to deal with its reasonable difficulty. It contrasts favourably with the following question set by another examining body, the difficulty of which is relieved by no freshness :

Give the origin and meaning of six of the following metaphorical expressions, and introduce them into six sentences :

To throw up the sponge.
A bolt from the blue.

To bell the cat.
To play to the gallery.
To draw in one's horns.
To take pot luck.
To eat humble pie.
To take a firm stand.

How many adult English specialists, incidentally, could give a satisfactory 'origin' of "To eat humble pie"? Can one even be certain that the examiner knows that pie was originally the French *pied*, and the expression's origin lies in mediaeval obeisance to suzerainty? And if he *did* know this, had he any right to expect School Certificate candidates in English to know it?

A good practice has come into a number of papers of printing in full a passage of prose or verse and then asking questions upon it: this is a welcome test of intelligence and comprehension rather than of the already over-tested memory. The following is a pleasant specimen of such a question set by the University of Durham:

Read the following passage carefully, and then answer the questions printed below:

You will find the same delight in the ornate in the poorest villages, where the severity of a door is mitigated by a charming piece of carving, and where the trellis of the windows forms a complicated and graceful pattern. You can seldom cross a bridge, in however unfrequented a district, without seeing in it the hand of an artist. The stones are so laid as to make an intricate decoration, and it seems as though these singular people judged with a careful eye whether a flat bridge or an arched one would fit in best with the surrounding scene. The balustrade is ornamented with lions or with dragons. I remember a bridge that must have been placed just where it was for the pure delight of its beauty rather than for any useful purpose, since, though broad enough for a carriage and pair to pass over it, it served only to connect a narrow path that led from one ragged village to another. The nearest town was thirty miles away. The broad river, narrowing at this point, flowed between two green hills, and nut trees grew on the bank. The bridge had no balustrade. It was con-

structed of immense slabs of granite and rested on five piers : the middle pier consisted of a huge and fantastic dragon with a long and scaly tail. On the sides of the outer slabs, running the whole length of the bridge, was cut in very low relief a pattern of an unimaginable lightness, delicacy and grace.

From W. Somerset Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*

- (a) Which sentence in the paragraph most clearly states its general theme ?
- (b) The of Chinese bridges is out of all proportion to their Supply a word to fill each of the gaps in this sentence.
- (c) If you were dividing this paragraph into two, where would you make the division ? What is the connection between the two parts ?
- (d) From the second half of the paragraph, pick out and quote two examples of the use of contrast.
- (e) " The nearest town was thirty miles away." Explain the relation of this sentence to the rest of the paragraph.

The following, from the same paper, is also an ingenious and effective method of testing a candidate's sense of words and style :

Without writing out the passage itself, pick out what you consider to be the most suitable word from each of the bracketed groups in the following extract and write it down. Explain the reasons which led you to choose a particular word in any *two* cases.

The thin gold {circlet
rim of the moon {dropping
shaving {floating slowly down-
coming
wards had lost itself on the darkened surface of the waters,
and the {domain
country beyond the sky seemed to come down nearer
eternity
to the earth, with the {augmented
shining glitter of the stars, with
charming
the more profound sombreness in the {lustre
gleaming of the half-
darkness
transparent dome covering the flat {expanse
circle of an opaque sea.
disc

The ship moved so smoothly that her onward motion was
 { delightful
 { imperceptible to the senses of men, as though she had been a
 { exhilarating
 crowded star speeding through the dark spaces of ether behind
 the swarm of suns, in the appalling and calm { latitudes
 { distances
 { solitudes
 awaiting the breath of future creations.

In contrast to the foregoing the following question is unsatisfactory :

The following passage described an imaginary ideal world of the future :

The world's great age begins anew,
 The golden years return ;
 The earth doth, like a snake, renew
 Her winter weeds outworn.
 Heaven smiles ; and faiths and empires gleam
 Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.

- (a) Rewrite the passage in your own words in such a way as to bring out clearly the meaning of every part.
- (b) Point out any features in the original passage which strike you as poetic and which thereby distinguish it from your prose rendering.

The phrasing of instruction (a) is wordy. Why not "Re-write the passage in prose" ? As it stands the instruction implies that Shelley could not express himself.

The phrase in (b), "Point out any features in the original passage which strike you as poetic" is inept. One might as well reprint a great passage from Beethoven and invite candidates to "Point out any features which strike you as musical".

When questions on letter-writing are set, the letter asked for should be on a suitable theme.

Write a letter to some suitable person asking for a testimonial.

School pupils are given testimonials by their head master or mistress : they do not write round for them.

Write a letter to an uncle mentioning that next week is your birthday, and referring to your favourite hobby.

It is no part of an examiner's business to encourage cadging.

In contrast the following invitation to letter-writing by the Central Welsh Board is well conceived and stimulating :

Write a brief letter (about fifty words, not counting the headings and the conclusion) to a stranger, whose garden backs on to yours, politely intimating that the wireless set is a source of disturbance to you and your neighbours.

The adverb "politely" indicates the proper requisite of tact.

The following question shows a lack of appropriate thought by the examiner :

You have been asked by the Chairman of one of your school Societies to propose a vote of thanks to a distinguished visitor who has just given a talk to the Society. Write out the brief speech, not exceeding 150 words, which you would make on this occasion.

Such a speech should be impromptu, or at any rate in a style appropriate to the spoken word : cast in a literary form, the speech is almost certain to be stilted and unnatural.

Another ingenious and fresh test in English composition may be quoted from a Welsh paper :

The following words occur (but not in the same order) in the final address by the Judge to a prisoner in a famous trial in literature :—deterrent, conclusive, vicious, severe, compassion, career, penal, impartial, convicted, aggravated. Compose a passage of not more than 150 words correctly introducing the above words.

A study of many printed papers causes one to reflect what a disservice examiners in formal English composition do to their subject by setting incompetent questions, and what service they can render by taking the trouble to set questions which compel interest and induce thought.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

The objection, as already stated, to a General paper on English literature, without prescribed books, is the difficulty of relating the questions to what the candidates happen to have read, and the danger of questions which can be answered without real acquaintance with the original works. The *reductio ad absurdum* of the latter type of question is "Name the author of the following works : *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Oliver Twist*, *Kidnapped*, etc." But hardly more satisfactory are the following two questions recently set :

Select any two of the following places and briefly narrate from Shakespeare's plays any one important incident that is connected with each : Arden, Athens, Belmont, Bohemia, Britain, Dunsinane, Elsinore, Harfleur, Rome, Shrewsbury.

Suppose the candidate's main study has been *The Tempest*, *Richard II*, *King John*, *Richard III*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, or *Romeo and Juliet* !

Even more arbitrary was an invitation to show first-hand knowledge of one of the following : *L'Allegro*, *Marmion*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Lays of Ancient Rome*, *Absalom and Achitophel*, the *Rubáiydt of Omar Khayyám*, *Travels with a Donkey*, *Past and Present*, *Prothalamion*, *Adonais*. One wonders how many 16-year-old candidates would select from this list *Absalom and Achitophel* or *Adonais*.

There is an element of groping, of for-goodness-sake-tell-me-if-you-possibly-can-anything-about-anything-you've-read in this kind of question, which is not scholarly, and reaches its apex (or nadir) in the following :

Consider the Authorised Version of the Bible as a work of great literary excellence. Illustrate your answer by reference to two or three specially noteworthy passages.

The picture of School Certificate candidates pondering (in twenty minutes) on the literary excellence of the Bible is no tribute to the examiner's sense of proportion.

Where set books and contexts are concerned the most dangerous feature is the setting of questions which are too hard. This is especially liable to happen when the same set book has been examined on several times and the obvious type of question, like the examiner, is exhausted. (Professor A. C. Bradley once refused to act as an examiner on the grounds that he had had already asked all the questions on Shakespeare which he could think of.)

Contexts, if set at all, should consist of reasonably striking passages with some substance in them : colourless lines, and sentences which might occur anywhere, reduce the question from a game of skill to a game of chance. It is reasonable to ask from *Poems of Today*, Second Series, for the context of

All the bright company of Heaven
Hold him in their high comradeship,
The Dog-star and the Sisters Seven,
Orion's Belt and sworded hip.

It is not reasonable to demand (as was demanded)

I am the light which never fails.

Is the following a fair question to ask at the School Certificate stage on *Henry IV*, Part I?—

Read the following passage and answer the questions below it :

Worcester. Look how we can, or sad or merrily,
Interpretation will misquote our looks,
And we shall feed like oxen at a stall,
The better cherish'd, still the nearer death.
My nephew's trespass may be well forgot ;
It hath the excuse of youth and heat of blood,
And an adopted name of privilege,
A hare-brain'd Hotspur, governed by a spleen :
All his offences live upon my head
And on his father's ; we did train him on,
And, his corruption being ta'en from us,
We, as the spring of all, shall pay for all.
Therefore, good cousin, let not Harry know,
In any case, the offer of the king.

- (a) What was *my nephew's trespass*, referred to in line 5 ?
- (b) What was the offer referred to in line 14, and what light is thrown upon the character of the speaker and of Hotspur by lines 13 and 14 ?
- (c) Explain fully the meaning of lines 3 and 4.
- (d) In this passage Worcester expresses his opinion of the treatment that he and Northumberland might expect from the King. Give a reason based on your knowledge of the play for agreeing or disagreeing with that opinion as regards
(i) Worcester himself, (ii) Northumberland.

The same paper contained the following conundrum on *Pride and Prejudice* :

Outline briefly the story told by Wickham to Elizabeth concerning his treatment by Darcy, and Darcy's subsequent explanation of his relations with Wickham. State what light is thrown upon the character of Elizabeth by her acceptance of Wickham's account.

Another examiner for the School Certificate asked recently on Selections from *Paradise Lost* :

What reasons are given in *Paradise Lost* for the necessity of the redemption of mankind ? How was it to be accomplished ?

The following year unsuitability was added to excessive difficulty :

Describe the temptation of Eve by Satan *and the effect upon Adam of her fall*.

The italics are the present writer's : candid reflection on the effect upon Adam of Eve's fall will explain why "unsuitability" is applied to the question.

This set of papers culminated in the query :

What do you find attractive and what unattractive in two of the following poems :—*The Female Vagrant*, *Ruth*, *Michael*, *Ode to Duty* ?

An examiner who incites pupils of Certificate age to find what is "unattractive" in Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty* — one of the greatest of Wordsworth's poems, and one of

the greatest poems in the world — reduces examining on English literature to a comedy little short of profane. Such a question plays so effectively into the hands of those who would abolish literature papers altogether that those who would defend them are driven nigh to despair.

Fair and suitable questions can of course be set without number, given common sense and thought proportionate on the part of the examiner to that required of the examinees. The following are examples of recent questions nicely attuned to their Certificate purpose :

Satan is the real hero of *Paradise Lost*. Discuss this statement and illustrate your answer by quotation.

Show by reference to three examples the ability of Falstaff to turn a difficult situation to his own advantage.

Illustrate the aptness of two of the following descriptions of character in *Pride and Prejudice* : the selfish father, the clerical toady, the too-exalted heroine.

The three foregoing questions typical of the majority set are appropriate and reasonable, but no one could call them inspired, distinguished, or stimulating. It could be wished that more questions like the following were included in our papers to lighten the shadows of the examination room :

If you were arranging a performance of *Richard II* how would you produce the scene in the Lists at Coventry ?

What qualifications does Stephano appear to have for making a satisfactory butler, or Trinculo for making a satisfactory jester ?

Draw a pen-and-ink picture to illustrate one of the following scenes :

- (a) The Cairo banker handling Kinglake's letter with the tongs during the plague.
- (b) Kinglake wrapping up his dinner in *The Times* to conceal from his servants his loss of appetite.

(An excellent thing thus to include a picture among a *choice* of questions.)

Consider the suitability of *Paradise Lost*, Book II, for filming, especially the flight of Satan from Hell to the world.

If examiners would thus conceive of their work as an art and not a routine, how much they might lighten the drudgery of all concerned by revealing that even the examination room may contain its hidden store of faery gold.

IX

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

BY W. A. GLAYDON

THE ends which may be served by a school library are so many, and its resources so relatively limited, that the first task of a school librarian is to determine, in their right order of priority, its most important functions. It must supplement the teaching of the various subjects in the curriculum. It must afford boys opportunity for practice in the finding of information, for this is the basis of self-education. It must meet the needs of the older boys engaged in Sixth Form and University scholarship work — young men whose intellectual quality and level of achievement may be far higher than that of the average undergraduate and whose needs and tastes in books will be incomprehensible to the average schoolboy. But important though these tasks are, it is doubtful whether any of them represents the primary function of the school library. Some would define this as the inculcation of the reading habit, the awakening of a love of books. This definition, however, overlooks the fact that most boys, by the time they enter a secondary school, have already acquired the reading habit and a love of what they at least would term 'books'. Reading is already the one universal hobby. Mr. Jenkinson's *What do Boys and Girls Read*, an illuminating if disconcerting investigation into the reading habits of 3000 boys and girls which no school librarian or teacher of English should fail to study, shows that boys of 12 are already reading out of school an average of five books a month, quite apart from their reading of periodicals. Instead of defining the primary function of the school library as the inculcation of the reading habit,

I should therefore term it the utilisation of the reading habit, and the provision of opportunities for exercising a growing discrimination in taste, largely as a result of increasing age but partly too of suggestion and training. Mr. Jenkinson's conclusion is provocative: "I suggest that a large supply of books and no teaching would produce similar or better results than does our present system of much teaching based on a few books, and that a rich supply of books, chosen with the cunning derived from knowledge and foresight, together with occasional stimulus from a teacher, would produce much better results". We may not accept this iconoclastic view in its entirety. But we may well agree that the provision of "a rich supply of books, chosen with the cunning derived from knowledge and foresight" and meeting the demands of readers of 11 to 16 with only occasional guidance and stimulus from the teacher, is a primary function of the school library.

"I would put a boy into a library and let him read at his choice." Dr. Johnson's intuition supports Mr. Jenkinson's laborious investigations. But his sound advice, in which freedom of choice is recognised as fundamental if reading is to become a delight, presupposes that there will be books in the library which an ordinary boy will choose to read. Such books often seem ephemeral rubbish to adult tastes. But we cannot confine a boy's reading to books which we regard as worth-while by restricting the contents of the school library to what meets with our adult approval. If we do so he will take his custom elsewhere, and rely on the chain library or the shelf of magazines and 'bloods' at the newsagent's. But if the school library can attract him from the first, and he comes to rely on it quite voluntarily for the provision of most of his reading, his education as a reader, through our largely unsuspected agency, becomes a possibility. He will be protected, without his knowledge, from the worst crudities of the commercial market in juvenile literature. Far more important, he may become an explorer. As he examines

the open shelves of the library and dips into books which look attractive, he will find that they deal with his hobbies and his appetite for facts about ships and railways and aeroplanes — that they meet his widening interests, his changing tastes, and (last of all) his deepening studies. He will read for information as well as for the sake of an exciting story, and, because he does not consciously distinguish between them, he may learn how false is the antithesis between reading for knowledge and reading for pleasure. But the acceptance and utilisation of the habit of reading natural to the boy's mental age is the root of all later possibilities of development; the habit of discrimination in reading must grow naturally from or be cunningly grafted upon it.

If I have laboured this point excessively, it is because of its bearing on every aspect of school library practice, and first and most important on the choice of books. This in turn depends on the annual library grant available, but this again is likely to be influenced by what the local education authority knows of the use to which each school will put it. If the school library is to meet the needs and interests of the younger boys on their admission as well as those of 18-year-old scholarship candidates, and if one criterion of its success is the extent to which boys of all ages rely on it for their supply of books, it cannot be run cheaply, for it must stock an exceptionally wide range of books. The Report on Libraries in Secondary Schools prepared for the Carnegie Trust suggests that 3s. per head may be regarded as an adequate minimum for the annual library grant. This is less than the sum per head usually spent on the purchase of chemicals for use each year in the laboratory — a scale of values which will seem odd to many. Much larger grants are of course essential over a period of years for newly established or under-stocked libraries. Even the suggestion of the Report involves the provision of much more generous grants by local education authorities than has usually been the case hitherto, but

this is surely an inevitable corollary of the more spacious library accommodation laid down in the Ministry's new building regulations. It would be ironical indeed if accommodation were increased only for the shelves to remain empty. A supplementary method of acquiring books which has much to commend it is the practice of presenting a book to the library on leaving school. The librarian will of course keep a desideratory list of books which should always be longer than his funds can meet.

Once the school librarian has determined his policy and knows his annual grant, he is faced with the problem of its apportionment among the many functions which the library must serve. There must be an adequate stock of works of reference such as dictionaries, atlases, encyclopaedias for boys of all ages (such works as the *Children's Encyclopaedia* and *Virtue's Treasury of Knowledge* are in constant demand by the younger boys), year books (of course *Whitaker*), books of statistics about the world's navies and mercantile marine and aircraft, and I would add as indispensable, at any rate for boys, a copy of *Bradshaw's Railway Guide* as well as local train and bus time-tables. Works of reference directly related to the curriculum will doubtless be suggested by the subject masters concerned; the rest will depend on the knowledge and observation of the librarian. Probably about half the total expenditure in a well-balanced library will be devoted to the purchase of books which are connected with the various subjects in the curriculum. These books will be suggested by the subject teachers, but the money allocated to each subject will vary greatly, and this will require tact and discrimination and the co-operation of the head master. It is not only that the needs of subjects vary — English and History clearly require an incomparably larger supply of books in the library than Mathematics, for instance — but that the suggestions of subject teachers will also vary greatly in value. Some will overstress the needs of Sixth Form work, and will quite forget the importance of simple, popular

books for the younger boys. Others will order books which will never be used, and it may be without having read them, simply to see that no money allotted to their subject is left unspent. A History master may never suggest any books dealing with the past thirty years because they are outside the curriculum or the examination syllabuses. It is the librarian's task to watch for these idiosyncrasies, to see that a proper balance is maintained and that no money is wasted on purchases which cannot be justified. It will save him great trouble if he insists on a standard order form being used on which author, name of book, publisher, and price must be inserted. He can in turn help his colleagues by keeping as complete a collection of catalogues as possible, and by calling their attention to the suggestions for school libraries prepared by panels expert in their various subjects, and published from time to time in *The School Library Review*. Fortunate indeed is the librarian who possesses every copy of this indispensable publication from its inception in 1936.

But the librarian's special responsibility is the choice of books of general interest, not directly related to any subject in the curriculum. This is the test of his breadth of interests and his knowledge of the demands and tastes of boys of all ages. His love of books must be such that he can find keen pleasure in the reading of publishers' catalogues and can cheerfully spend hours in bookshops on his visits to London or Oxford or Cambridge, armed with a notebook and prepared to browse in children's books as well as those which meet his adult tastes. He will gain help from such of his colleagues as possess these rare qualities and from contacts with other librarians — he will be particularly fortunate if his head master shares his love of books, and they can enjoy together the pleasures and responsibilities of choosing them. It is in the choice of books of general interest that he will find a suggestions book and the advice of a library committee representing boys of all ages particularly useful, provided that the

ultimate decisions are his — the detailed work of selection can seldom be wisely entrusted to any committee. But he must take care that the library does not become a reflection of his personal tastes and prejudices.

First among works of general interest comes fiction. This is the primary reading matter of boys as well as of adults, and the teacher of English must not priggishly condemn as rubbish and waste of time the ephemeral but pleasure-giving books with which the wise librarian tempts the young. The appetite of boys for the works of Richmal Crompton and for fantastically improbable school and adventure stories is surely as harmless as that of dons and schoolmasters and bishops for the latest detective story, and the latter cannot claim the indulgence due to youthful limitations and ignorance of higher pleasures. If masters, and particularly teachers of English, would frankly admit to boys the large part which reading simply for amusement played in their leisure, boys would be less secretive and apologetic about their own tastes in books, and less fearful of condemnation for their love of thrills and humour and adventure. They would also be more ready to accept the recommendations of books by their elders — more ready, too, to discuss discriminatingly the very different levels of excellence which may mark popular works of the same type. It is a great step forward, for instance, when the lover of cruder detective stories abandons them for those of Dorothy Sayers or Agatha Christie.

For boys in the Sixth Form there must be novels which are an introduction to, and interpretation of, life as it is. They are ready and eager for such an imaginative widening of their experiences, and it is a necessary and most valuable part of their preparation for adult life. But for the younger boys there must also be on the fiction shelves much that seems worthless to our adult tastes, and which the boys themselves will outgrow. At a certain stage in their mental growth they like it, and it will attract them to the library — that is its sufficient justification. Our skill will be shown

in what we skilfully intermingle with it. Their choice of books "can be improved, and in two ways : first, by an open acceptance of, and understanding attention to, what boys do choose to read ; and secondly, by a careful diagnosis of the germs or the active beginnings of future tastes in their actual reading and by sympathetic cultivation thereof".¹ Mr. Jenkinson follows up this statement by giving a detailed account, which no school librarian should miss, of his investigations into the adult books voluntarily read by boys of 12 to 15. They show the possibilities of enjoyment which boys of these ages find in the works of Buchan, Doyle, Stevenson, Kipling, Wells, and Chesterton. More surprising to many will be Mr. Jenkinson's proof of the popularity of Scott and Dickens among adult authors read by boys of from 12 to 15. And here I would make a strong plea for the inclusion of abridged, as well as of complete, editions of as many of their novels as possible, and of other long novels for adults which boys enjoy, such as those of Dumas and Kingsley. Only an exceptional boy will at 12 or 13 attempt to read a novel of 400 or 500 pages — the ordinary boy will be deterred by its sheer bulk. Many excellent abridged editions are available at a low price in Dent's King's Treasuries, Nelson's Teaching of English and Books within Books series, and editions by other publishers. Selections of short stories or of tales of real adventure, and abridgements of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and other great stories of the past are also available in editions which will be read with pleasure by younger boys if brought to their notice. I would also urge that the worth-while books most popular with boys of these ages should be duplicated. They should be frequently brought to their notice by the librarian or English masters, either by personal recommendation or by form reading lists, and if they are not available when recommended a valuable opportunity may pass by. This suggests a possible use for form libraries as an integral part

¹ *What Do Boys and Girls Read*, p. 36.

of the school's English teaching — instead of all boys in a form possessing and studying the same prose book for a term, buy instead for each form some twenty or thirty different books, and circulate them once a fortnight, or more often if need be. A weekly period can be allowed for issue, reading and discussion, and if the books are well chosen, boys will require little urging to complete the reading of them at home. This is an effective way of introducing boys to 80 or 100 books, worth reading and suited to their tastes and ages, in the first four years of their secondary school career. Books which prove unsuitable or unpopular can be changed each year. I have found this plan most effective in practice; I owed the suggestion to a stimulating article by E. T. Thomas.¹ Similar results might be achieved by suggested reading lists for each form based on the contents of the school library, but it is less easy to control regular circulation and the availability of the books as they are required. The books in these form libraries, which will be purchased from funds available for English and not set apart for the library, should in any case also be found in the school library. Lastly, there is much to be said in favour of separating works of fiction intended for younger boys from the standard works of fiction for older boys and adults; rows of shelves which are inconveniently low for easy examination by the latter present no problem of perpetual stooping to small boys and may be used for this purpose. The young will be spared many disappointments; the academic mind will be spared the sight of the works of Joseph Conrad and Richmal Crompton sharing the same shelf. If the Dewey system is in use, juvenile fiction can be classified as 823 J, to distinguish it from standard fiction, 823.

But if the younger boys, like adults, are primarily interested in fiction, many of them also have an insatiable thirst for facts. Among books of general interest not

¹ *School Library Review*, Summer Term, 1936.

directly connected with the curriculum must be an ample supply of popular books on ships, railways, aeroplanes, engineering, and science. The admirable series of "Wonder Books" (Ward, Lock) are in constant demand by new boys, and make some of them confirmed users of the school library. The Discovery Books (Nelson), the Pageant of Progress series (O.U.P.), and similar books produced by various other publishers are equally popular with somewhat older boys. The reading of French may be surprisingly stimulated by the provision of a similar series — *Encyclopédées par l'Image* — published by Hachette. But in no section of the library is it more necessary to keep up-to-date — the librarian will do well to keep a constant watch for these books in the children's section of a large bookshop. A census of hobbies will also reveal many interests which the wise librarian will meet. Stamp collecting is so popular that the provision of catalogues and other books on philately will attract many to the library. Cycling may require the provision of local guides, books on topography, and a box-file of Ordnance maps; the popularity of the Batsford book dealing with your own district may lead to a demand for the whole series with their admirable photographs. Books will be needed on birds and flowers, on fishing, farming, gardening and the care of pets, on drawing, lettering, model-making and handicraft, on music (including a supply of miniature scores), on indoor games such as chess and on all outdoor games played at the school, on scouting and camping, on photography and the cinema, and — this is very important — on careers. On some of these subjects suggestions will be obtained from subject masters, but the right balance between them, and between simple and more advanced treatments of each of them, can only be maintained by the watchfulness and enterprise of the librarian.

There are two further points which must be made in connection with the provision of books. First, the rejection of all books which never have been and never will be read

must be firm and rigorous. They are often bequests, usually well-meant but quite unsuitable, but occasionally, it would seem, simply rejects from their donor's shelves. However they have been come by, they must be removed. Secondly, the rebinding of books must be undertaken systematically before they are past repair, and a sum of money set aside for the purpose annually. Books in obvious decay are as depressing as those which are dead. Moreover, the presence of books in a library which are falling to pieces makes it much harder to inculcate that respect for the handling of books which is part of sound library training.

The provision of periodicals and newspapers is as much a function of the library as the provision of books, though it may often be convenient to set aside an adjacent room for their reading. Some purchases will be dictated by the needs of the older boys — weeklies such as the *Listener*, the *New Statesman* and the *Spectator*, and if funds allow, a daily copy of *The Times*, are essential for intelligent members of the Sixth Form. But the tastes of the younger boys must not be overlooked, and here the advice of a library committee of boys is specially helpful. Younger boys learn much from the eye and some good illustrated weeklies will be in great demand. The supply of periodicals should be regularly reviewed, so that those in little use may be discarded. Periodicals are best kept in racks or on tables if accommodation is generous; stoutly made, transparent covers are by far the most attractive when they can be obtained.

Accommodation is too often quite inadequate. The new building regulations laid down by the Ministry of Education require the provision of libraries at least 960 square feet in area in all secondary schools. It is important to remember that this requirement applies not only to new schools; it will in due course be obligatory for the library accommodation in all schools to be brought up to this minimum standard. It is not as generous as the

recommendations of the Report on School Libraries or the practice of the most enlightened authorities, one of which is adopting a room of 1460 square feet as its standard, but it represents a step forward for the majority of schools. The Report on Secondary School Libraries presented to the Carnegie Trust contains a most useful chapter on accommodation, lay-out, and equipment. It stresses the need of making the library as inviting and attractive as possible — everything should be done to avoid its resembling a classroom. A pleasing colour-scheme, light oak furniture, a few attractive reproductions of modern pictures, convenient shelves never out of reach of the average boy, some dwarf island bookcases forming pleasant alcoves, and, above all, well-designed and comfortable chairs, are all desirable — “chairs are generally too utilitarian, suggestive of a kitchen rather than a library”, as the Report so truly comments. A shelf should be set aside for the display of newly purchased books, so attractive in their bright and unworn bindings, and a longer display of their gay dust-covers may be decorative as well as informative. A notice-board on which, in addition to book reviews and suggestions for reading, there are weekly reminders of broadcast talks, plays, and music worth hearing or films worth seeing, will make the library seem a centre of cultural activities. Even in old and ill-designed libraries much can be done to make them more attractive — dark-stained and ink-spotted tables can be planed and revarnished in the woodwork room, cupboards can be easily turned into open shelves, fresh paint and distemper and a new colour scheme will work wonders when the time for redecoration comes, and an attractive alcove may often be made by the purchase or construction of a couple of island bookcases. It is of course vital that the library should be looked upon as a special room with a function of its own, and that it should never be used as a classroom.

The organisation and use of the school library depends in part on the accommodation it provides, but to a far

greater extent on the conception of its functions held by the librarian and the head master. Some of the comments in the Report on Secondary School Libraries, published only three years before the war, make surprising reading :

There are schools in which the library is regarded rather as a source of prestige to the school than as an indispensable part of the machinery of education ; in such schools the use of the library is limited to the Sixth Form, the books are kept behind locked doors and the librarian's concern for the books would seem to be chiefly that none are missing from the shelves, rather than that they are profitably used. There are other schools in which the library is used chiefly, if not wholly, to supplement the work of the curriculum. Here it is common to find the giving-out of books strictly supervised and the pupils directed to read certain books considered suitable by their teachers, in which they are tested before another book is taken out.

This picture would seem fantastic if it occurred elsewhere than in the pages of a sober report prepared by a most competent committee. The practices described are of course entirely opposed to the conception of the function of a library implicit in all I have written. If the aim is to utilise and develop a boy's reading habits from his entry into the school, it follows that the guiding principle of library organisation must be to make its books as accessible as possible to boys of all ages. It should be open at all times for boys engaged in private study, and for as generous periods as possible out of school hours for reading and the issue and return of books — certainly during the dinner interval and for an hour after the end of afternoon school each day. Limitations of space may make it necessary to adopt a system of rotation for forms using it, but the restrictions on its use should be as few as possible — the ideal is that any boy should be able to take out books on any day, irrespective of age or form. In the library itself everything should be done to make access to books easy — cupboards and glass doors and impossibly high shelves are hindrances which should not be tolerated. Rules

should be few and simple, and supervision as unobtrusive as possible — the library is a room in which the need of self-discipline should be learnt out of consideration for others, though the presence of a master or senior boy will be necessary at rush hours.

If the library is to be freely used, the issuing system must be quick and simple. The borrower of any particular book must be easily traceable, and overdue books should be identifiable at once. If possible the system adopted should also enable a record to be kept of each boy's reading. There are many systems, but I have not found a better than that in use in the Bristol Grammar School. A slip is filled in by the borrower for each book taken out. On it he inserts author, title, class mark, and his own name and form. The date of issue is stamped by a sub-librarian after scrutiny of the entries, and then filed by him under the author's name in a tray behind alphabetical guide-cards. After a book has been returned, the sub-librarian extracts the appropriate slip from the tray, cancels the date of return with a date stamp, and files the slip in a "returned" tray under the boy's form. At the end of each term each boy's slips, which form a complete record of his reading and an invaluable indication of his tastes and interests, can be quickly sorted out and made available for form master or head master. Head masters will find it extraordinarily helpful to keep them in the office, and to have them ready for reference in conjunction with a boy's record card and folder. A most ingenious feature of this issuing system is the use of slips of three different colours which are changed round each week; the colour of the slips in the tray indicates at once which books are overdue. A full description of the system is to be found in the *School Library Review* for the Easter Term, 1937. Boys — intelligent boys even as young as 13 or 14 — make efficient sub-librarians and can be trained to receive and stamp the slips, to file them correctly in the tray, to extract slips for overdue books, and to make lists of the defaulters for cir-

culatation to form masters. They perform these tasks in rotation punctiliously and in many cases derive obvious pleasure from them. Once the librarian has trained boys as sub-librarians to carry out these routine duties, he will be free to devote himself to the much more important tasks of general supervision and organisation, though he must always be an efficient and vigilant administrator. As soon as boys have become accustomed to freedom of access to the shelves, to a clear and orderly issuing system, and above all to taking a co-operative pride and pleasure in the service which the library provides, losses will be very few. Such losses as occur will be due chiefly to carelessness or hurry — failure to fill in a slip or to hand it to the sub-librarian. My experience is that members of the Staff or the Sixth Form, who probably have the privilege of taking books out at any time and of operating the issuing system themselves, are more often at fault in this respect than younger boys.

The advantages and disadvantages of the various schemes for the classification of books are too technical to be dealt with in a short article. But since the Dewey system is in use in the great majority of public libraries, there seems much to be said in favour of making boys familiar with it, in its abridged version, through its adoption in the school library. A brief description of whatever system is adopted should be posted on the library notice-board, and neat label-holders containing class numbers should be used on the shelves. There is much to be said in favour of marking the back of each book with its classification number ; if this is done the librarian will find an electric pencil a most useful possession. The cataloguing of a library is a lengthy task unless it has been systematically undertaken from its inception. An accession register, and loose-leaf shelf-lists which sub-librarians can use for terminal stock-taking, are indispensable. The preparation of an author catalogue on cards to be filed in cabinets takes time but is most desirable ; it is invaluable for borrowers, and

trains them for the intelligent use of a public library. An alphabetical subject catalogue involves so much labour to prepare that it is perhaps too much to expect to find one in a school library unless the librarian is given a generous allowance of free periods, as he should be but seldom is.

The use made of the library will depend in large measure on the librarian's policy with regard to book selection, ease of access, and simplicity of organisation. But it will also depend on the co-operation of form masters and subject masters, and on the attitude towards the library displayed by the head master, who can be an invaluable ally. On most staffs there are too many masters ignorant of the contents of the library — even of the books which have a bearing on their own subjects — and whose teaching (at any rate below the Sixth Form) is based almost entirely on the textbooks ordered for class use. Each master should have a thorough knowledge of those books in the library dealing with his own subject which will appeal to boys of whatever age he is teaching, and should constantly bring them to their notice — it is surprising how many men seem to feel that their duty towards the library has ended when they have responded to the librarian's request for suggestions for purchases, and who forget that a more important duty is to ensure that the books they suggest are read. Teachers of most subjects — not only of English, but of Scripture, History, Geography, Languages, Science, and Art — would do well to take their classes to the library for an occasional conducted tour of the appropriate shelves. If they are insufficiently stocked with suitable books to make a tour worth while, the fault may well be their own. Form masters, as well as English masters, who watch their boys' reading and who are familiar with the contents of the fiction shelves, can by seemingly casual recommendations exercise a strong influence over the development of their taste. If they are sometimes present in the library at the times when boys are taking out books, they are seizing the best of all opportunities for fruitful suggestions.

The publication of monthly statistics on the use made of the library by each form, giving the average number of books taken out per boy, is always revealing and often arouses a spirit of emulation which is useful in moderation. Nor will the use made of the library by members of the staff pass unnoticed by the boys — example is better than precept in inspiring a love of books. In addition to these indirect or occasional methods, some direct training in the use of the library will be needed by newcomers. This is probably best given by the librarian himself — if he does not teach the entrance forms himself, an exchange of periods can be arranged without difficulty. He can teach them the method of issuing books, and show them something of the contents of the library. New boys need to be taught how to use works of reference, and the occasional use in class of a set of books such as W. D. Wright's *Are You Sure?* (Dent), with questions to be answered from fifty pages of extracts from *Whitaker's* and other year-books, encyclopaedias, and time-tables, is an exercise which many boys of 11 find exciting and enjoyable, and which prepares them for the later use of reference books in the library itself. Experiments in the use of library periods, and in schemes of individual or co-operative research work on a given topic requiring the use of the library, may be made in many subjects. The library schemes in use at Oundle will interest many teachers.

But the desire to integrate the library too closely with the work of the school and the subjects of the curriculum has its dangers. For if the library is to do its work effectively it must above all be used voluntarily, and must not be associated with undue direction or compulsion, though children welcome guidance and suggestion. The library is the room in which school subjects, as such, may be forgotten, reading enjoyed for its own sake, and the artificial distinction between work and amusement, recreation and the acquisition of knowledge, broken down. Freedom, and the sense of pleasure which accompanies the fulfilment

of changing, growing needs, are essential to the library atmosphere. Pleasure, at least as an accompaniment if not as an end, is not as bad a guide to the choice of books as the over-earnest sometimes seem to fear — they need to be reminded of the saying of the philosopher who can least of all be regarded as a hedonist : “ Pleasure is the feeling of the furtherance of life, pain of its obstruction ”. This is surely true of the living growth of the mind ; pleasure is the feeling of its furtherance, of its natural unforced development. It was the poet who claimed that each of his poems had a worthy purpose who also stated that the necessity of giving immediate pleasure was the one restriction under which he and all poets wrote — pleasure to men, however, and not, save exceptionally, to children, for the greatest literature deals with a range of experience beyond their knowledge and comprehension. This is too often forgotten — we expect our pleasures to be theirs. We are too eager to see results before boys leave us when we should be content if a few seeds which we have helped to implant bear fruit long afterwards. The librarian and the English teacher above all need faith and patience.

X

THE TRAINING OF THE TEACHER OF ENGLISH

BY A. H. STEWART AND V. DE S. PINTO

A DISCUSSION of the training of the teacher of English must attempt to answer three questions. What is the work of the teacher of English? What personal qualities and what sort of equipment does he need? What kind of training is likely to provide him with these qualities and this equipment?

The first question immediately takes us beyond a discussion of the content of the English course in school, for content must depend largely on the aims of the teaching of English and the relation of these aims to the wider purposes of education, both individual and social. It is, however, a specially difficult task for the teacher of English to formulate his aims at present. The Education Act of 1944 proposes the abandonment of an 'elementary' education which has never emancipated itself from its origin as "a cheap education for the children of the poorer classes". The Primary School is to be freed from the bad conditions and the examinations which prevented its curriculum from being considered in terms of "activity and experience". The proposed re-casting of Secondary Education is bound to affect the Grammar School, and to offer much richer opportunities to the English teacher in the Technical and Modern School. Training in the use of the mother tongue and the effective transmission of the cultural heritage of literature to the great mass of the population are matters of increasing urgency. All these factors enforce a reconsideration of our aims in English teaching, because new opportunities are presented. On the other hand, criticism

of the traditional aims is vigorous. There is strong criticism of the English work of the Grammar School, which is part of a wider attack on the cultural-vocational distinction inherited by the Grammar School and strong in the University. The mood of anxious self-questioning produced by these attacks is intensified by fundamental critical controversies in the subject itself¹ and by the new emphasis thrown by these on the social importance of language. These new difficulties are added to two old ones that every English teacher knows: the limitation of the scope of any generalisations about aim and method by the subjective and personal elements in appreciation and expression, and the complication of the work of the specialist teacher by the fact that the mother tongue is the medium of all teaching.

The difficulties of formulating clear aims should not dishearten us because they arise in the main from increasing awareness of the importance of English studies in the widest sense, and we can make a tentative beginning with the definition of English work in schools given by the Norwood Report.²

- (1) By English we mean in the first instance training in the comprehension and arrangement and expression of ideas and the chief objective of the training is clarity. . . . English in this sense lies behind all subjects, for in them the logical arrangement and clear expression of ideas are demanded. . . .
- (2) In addition, as a specific subject of the curriculum, English involves —
 - (a) Further training in the use of the English language, usually undertaken by means of exercises in composition and essay-writing, the teaching of formal grammar, and the study of prose passage.
 - (b) The study of English literature.

¹ See E. M. W. Tillyard and C. S. Lewis, *The Personal Heresy*; F. R. Leavis, *Revaluations*; C. S. Lewis, *Rehabilitations* and *The Abolition of Man*; D. Daiches, *New Literary Values*.

² The Norwood Report (1941), p. 91.

The first section of the work as outlined above is commonly summarised in the axiom that "every teacher is a teacher of English", and it is justified not only because language is the medium of all teaching but by the equally important fact that power over language develops in accordance with needs and interests. Not all intelligent pupils have a specific 'literary' gift. Many find their strongest interests in science, in practical subjects, and in the affairs of daily life; it is in these activities that such pupils can see most clearly the need for effective comprehension and expression. The Norwood Report, however, does not go on to discuss the practical difficulties of this axiom. If there is a specialist English teacher responsible for the second part of the work — 2 (a) and (b) — what is his function with regard to the co-operative task defined in section (1)? Is he to direct "English" work in all subjects, and for this purpose is he to have a smattering of them all? Or is his classroom to be a sort of clinic for acute and chronic cases of language deficiency? One effect of the extreme application of the axiom is seen in the unfortunate experience of some American High Schools where the English specialist as we know him has practically disappeared from the school.¹

It is to be hoped that an excessively literal application of certain passages in the Norwood Report will not lead to similar results in this country, where the English teacher is commonly the chief and sometimes the only source of humanistic activities in grammar and secondary schools. It is clear, however, that the general language work must be planned as a whole, and that the English teacher must help by reason of his specialised knowledge. To equip him for this task, implied in section (1) he needs a wider training than he generally gets at present, especially in the philosophy of language (as distinct from academic philo-

¹ *The Training of Secondary School Teachers, especially with reference to English.* Report of a Joint Committee of the Faculty of Harvard College and the Graduate School of Education. Harvard University Press, 1942.

logy), and intensive reading in other subjects besides *belles lettres*. It is clear also that the specialist teachers of other subjects will benefit from some specific guidance in methods of teaching comprehension and expression in their own subjects ; and in the lower forms of all types of secondary schools, it would be helpful to have teachers who are able to undertake the teaching of English and one or more subjects of the curriculum. The non-graduate teacher who has come from a Training College is already to some extent equipped in this way, but the need for a reformed General Degree course in the Universities as a preparation for graduate teachers is urgent.

A similar problem arises when we consider the more specialised training in oral and written expression — 2 (a) — which is the concern of the English teacher. The criticism that “the essay, in its usual form, has had a harmful influence on the development of the power to write naturally and effectively”, because it lacks for so many pupils the two prerequisites of a good exercise, — something to say and the desire to say it, — points to the need for written work drawn from a wide field varied in form, and adequate in incentive. This larger conception of written composition, and the urgent need to develop more effective oral work based on the widest range of interests in the pupils, must lead the specialist English teacher into fields for which his training has not hitherto directly prepared him.

It is most desirable that primary school children should talk and write about the world around them, and that adolescents should discuss various aspects of the adult world which they are so eager to enter. The average English teacher can manage well enough the expressional aspects of these topics and no doubt their elementary forms, but his training may not have made him a student of society, and at higher levels this limitation can be dangerous.

This need for a wider conception of English work is emphasised also by another concern of the English teacher.

Recent studies have drawn attention to the social aspects of language as the medium in which the cultural values of the community are preserved and transmitted. At the present time when so many agencies yoke the language to trivial things and base uses, when the energy of common speech and the clarity of official documents are obstructed by clichés, the teacher of English has a special responsibility for awakening in his pupils a sensitiveness to the quality of the instrument of language, so that they can detect the intentions of those who misuse it.

If the English teacher is to exercise some effective direction over the whole language work of the school, if he is to widen the range of his material, both in comprehension and expression, to suit the needs and interests of all his pupils, if he is to treat critically the language of the newspaper, the orator, the advertiser, and the best-seller, he needs a training in language that emphasises its semantic aspects and includes some special study of its psychology. His literary training should help, too, if it enables him to see literature as the expression of the national culture, showing in each age, "the body of the time, his form and pressure", a kind of knowledge which can hardly be obtained from a narrow study of literary history and of the methods of textual criticism. He needs also, as in fact all teachers need, if they are to make their teaching relevant to the modern world, some study of contemporary society, that is, of the society which is determining in a large measure the interests and opportunities of his pupils.

We must now consider the teaching of literature, which the teacher of English rightly feels to be his special task. Indeed in the majority of secondary schools, where there is very little teaching of the Latin and Greek classics, and where the Modern Language teachers are commonly absorbed to a large extent in their purely linguistic work, the English teacher is in effect the only teacher of literature. It is a task which requires special qualities of personality, voice, and expression. The English teacher has to teach

a subject which is both an art and a craft. His training, therefore, must include both the acquisition of skill in the lucid and compact ordering of words and also the much subtler process of learning the grammar of an art by means of the study of the structure and significance of master-pieces. If he is to transmit any part of the great heritage of English verse and prose to his pupils, he must know the works of the great masters not as dead museum-pieces but as living and creative presences, "burning atoms of inextinguishable thought". He must know them, too, not in isolation — but in their setting of social and political and economic history and of philosophic and religious thought. Above all he must pay particular attention to the development of contemporary literature, because contemporary literature is an expression of that adult world which the child is longing to enter ; it speaks the language of that world and through the study of it, therefore, discrimination and appreciation of literary excellence can often be most easily taught. More than any other teacher, the teacher of English is concerned with the child's imagination.

The first thing the average educator sets to work to kill in the young [writes Bertrand Russell] is imagination. Imagination is lawless, undisciplined, individual, and neither correct or incorrect ; in all these respects it is inconvenient for the teacher, especially when competition requires a rigid order of merit. The problem of the right treatment of the imagination is rendered more difficult by the fact that, in most children, it decays spontaneously as interest in the real world increases. Adults in whom imagination remains strong are those who have retained from childhood something of its emancipation from fact ; but if adult imagination is to remain valuable, its emancipation must not spring from ignorance, but from a certain lack of slavishness. *Farinata degli Uberti* held Hell "in great contempt", in spite of having to live there for ever.¹

It is this attitude towards fact that is most likely to promote fruitful imagination in the adult. The successful teacher

¹ Bertrand Russell, *Education and the Social Order* (1932), pp. 162, 163.

of literature must himself achieve the "emancipation from fact" of which Bertrand Russell writes and he must acquire the power of transmitting it. To achieve it himself he must pass his youth not over-driven in a desperate competition with his fellows to memorise facts good, bad, and indifferent, in order to cope with a nightmare procession of examinations from School Certificate to Post-graduate Diploma, but in a free and enlightened society of cultivated men and women who not only work with their intellects, but also have the leisure and the inclination to enjoy the arts and to learn the art of living. To transmit the culture acquired in such a society the teacher of English must establish a satisfactory relation with his pupils, and this can only be done if he is a "good human being" with the virtues of kindliness, charity, and tact. His training must therefore be a humanising process as well as the acquisition of a skill and the knowledge of an art. He must have a good voice and know how to read aloud effectively. A poem or prose passage read well to children may have a permanent effect in liberating their imaginations; the same words read badly may close the door for ever on the great heritage of English literature.

The teacher of English needs also the power to penetrate sympathetically into the minds of his pupils and an understanding of their environment in order to choose properly the studies to which they can respond. All education is a commentary on experience, but the school is prone to offer its commentary before the child has had the necessary experience and even when the child's environment prevents him from having this experience at all. This divorce between commentary and experience is the cause of that fatal distinction between "literature" and "interesting books" which grows unconsciously in the minds of so many children in B and C forms.¹ That the School Certificate Examination encourages in the Grammar School a premature and too formal study of the English

¹ See A. J. Jenkinson, *What Boys and Girls Read*.

classics is generally agreed, but to suppose that the examination is the sole or even the major cause of failure to make literature living to many pupils is too simple an answer. Discussions with Training College students and with undergraduates who are not reading English suggests that our work is aimed too often at the pupils whose talents and ambitions are like our own, and the remainder fail, more or less, to see the point of much of their literary study. We must allow also for the effect on taste and interest of the cinema, the newspaper, the radio, and the whole environment of mass industrial society. To deplore all this and then be led to a neglect of those pupils who, by the old criteria of a liberal education, are considered irredeemably insensitive, is a defeat, and a defeat for which we shall in future have to pay heavily. The influence of a barely literate population on language and contemporary culture is already plain to see.

Just as the nineteenth century had to find in such men as Arnold and Thring teachers "able to weld effectively the spirit of traditional humanism to the complex demands of business and politics and administration and professional services in an industrialised nation which had also to govern an Empire",¹ so the twentieth century has to find the teachers who can use the opportunities offered by the 1944 Act to develop a genuine national education in which the humanist spirit responds effectively to the needs of an industrial democracy living in a world profoundly different from that of 1840.

In this adaptation of humanism to modern needs English studies should have an important and possibly a central place, but only if they are as widely conceived as Thomas Arnold's conception of the classical curriculum. English studies should be wide enough to include political and social history, scientific development in its broad aspects, and the history of ideas so that for some pupils they may have the unity, range, and depth of the classical

¹ See Sir Fred Clarke *Education and Social Change*, p. 23.

curriculum. They must also be wide enough to attract pupils whose interests are more strongly directed to social studies, science, and the plastic arts, so that they too may be led to enjoy literature because they see its relevance to their own lives and purposes.

We can now turn to the third of our questions. What are the forms of training which best secure the qualities and equipment needed by the English teacher if he is effectively to undertake the tasks we have outlined? At present a candidate for the teaching profession can be trained either at a Training College or a University. If he attends a Training College, the duration of his course is two years ; and during this period he lives and works exclusively among students who are being trained for the same profession. This is the chief defect of the Training College system. In spite of the efforts of many excellent principals and lecturers, the atmosphere of the Training College is necessarily that of the seminary or forcing-house, which is not calculated to produce a " good human being " with a free mind and an alert imagination. The other great disadvantage is the shortness of course. Two years is not long enough for a student leaving a secondary school with a School Certificate to acquire the knowledge of his subject which a competent teacher ought to have and the minimum of proficiency in the technique of teaching. As far as the teacher of English is concerned, the Training College syllabus has the advantage of including a compulsory course on the use of the English language. This course includes exercises in précis, paraphrase, letter-writing, etc., as well as the formal essay, and also the analysis and appreciation of various kinds of English prose. It is an attempt to give the student at least a grounding in the craft of using the English language as an instrument of expression and communication. The Literature courses consist of the study of a number of " set books " which usually include one or more plays of Shakespeare, an anthology of verse and some modern novels and plays,

and a period of literature or a special form such as the ballad or the drama, together with books for general reading. There is usually an "Advanced Course" in which similar studies are carried to a higher level with the addition, sometimes, of a study of poems of Chaucer or other Middle English texts. In some colleges the Advanced Course may include the preparation of a long essay or dissertation on a literary topic. Because of the shortness of time and the congested time-table, the courses in English Literature at Training Colleges, though often stimulating, generally lack substance and tend to be sketchy. All the student can hope to acquire from them is knowledge of some good texts and some increase of discrimination and sensibility. One great advantage of the Training College course is that the 'academic' and 'professional' elements in it are studied concurrently and are closely correlated. If, in accordance with the recommendations of the McNair Committee, the duration of the course is extended to three years, and if the isolation of the colleges can be broken down by means of close co-operation with the Universities, the Training College course might provide an excellent education for the teacher of English.

The University course for teachers extends over a minimum of three and a maximum of four years. Two or three years are devoted entirely to a degree course, and one to a course in the Education Department which deals exclusively with 'professional' training. The University student has the great advantage of living in a much larger and more varied community than that of the Training College. His fellow students are not all going to be teachers,¹ and he rubs shoulders daily with budding doctors, lawyers, parsons, and scientists. To live in such

¹ The student community is, of course, much more varied at Oxford, Cambridge, and London than at the provincial Universities, where the condition of the Arts Faculty often approximates to that of the Training College, as about 90 per cent of the students are going to be teachers; but even in these Universities there are other faculties where the proportion of candidates for the teaching profession is much smaller.

a community is in itself part of a 'liberal education', especially where the student body has a rich and varied corporate life with literary, debating, philosophic, musical, dramatic, religious, and political societies. The University departments of English offer a variety of "Honour" or "Special" degree courses. Most of them are schools of "English Language and Literature", of which the London Honours degree course and the Oxford Honour School may be taken as types. The Cambridge English Tripos stands alone as a school of English "Life, Literature and Thought", and some of the English Honour schools in the provincial Universities have features in common with it, though for the most part they follow the London or Oxford patterns. The "Language and Literature" schools are descended historically from courses which were mainly philological. The London syllabus includes a formidable array of Old and Middle English texts and the examination demands a fairly thorough knowledge of Old and Middle English grammar and philology. The History of the English language with Gothic and Old Norse are optional subjects. The literary part of the course consists of a study of the history of English literature up to 1880 with the chief emphasis placed on the earlier periods. Modern Literature from 1880 to the present day is an optional subject, and the History of Literary Criticism can be taken as an alternative to the History of the English Language with Gothic.

It is very doubtful whether the philological part of the course has much value for the average student who is going to teach English in school. It is necessary, doubtless, for the very small minority who are going to be University teachers, and desirable for the one school teacher in a hundred who specialises in English philology; but the great majority of students who are going to teach English in schools 'get it up' in a mechanical way as a mere necessary drudgery and forget almost every scrap of it soon after they have passed their degree examination.

Nothing could be better calculated to produce the 'slavish' attitude towards facts deplored by Bertrand Russell. In fact for the average student reading for Honours in English the philological part of the course is the modern equivalent to the Hypothetical Language studied in the Colleges of Unreason in *Erewhon*. Sir Bernard Pares, the former Head of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in the University of London, writes¹ that in twenty years of experience as Head of that School he always found that "of twenty beginners only one wanted the [Russian] language for philology. The others all wanted it as a master-key to the study of the country — certainly its literature, but also its history and economics." What Sir Bernard Pares writes about students of Russian applies to the great majority of students in the University departments of English who are going to enter the teaching profession. They want an English course as a key to the understanding of English life and English literature, and for this purpose the study of sound changes in Old and Middle English, and even of the text of *Beowulf*, excellent things doubtless in themselves, are almost wholly irrelevant. One of the greatest defects of the "Language and Literature" schools is that they give the student little knowledge of the growth and structure of contemporary English and very little training in the craft of writing flexible and expressive modern English prose. In fact it is not unfair to say that syllabuses of the London type encourage students to regard the history of the English language as a series of dead museum-pieces rather than as the growth of a living organism. The literary part of the course is also open to grave objections. English Literature is considered too much in isolation without regard to its philosophic, economic, and social background and its relationship to other arts and to foreign literatures. It is true that this isolation is mitigated in the "Language and Literature" courses of some of the provincial Universities by the study of a subsidiary or special

¹ Sir Bernard Pares, *Russia and the Peace* (Penguin Books).

subject which may be a foreign literature, or philosophy, or the history of fine art. It is also fair to point out that the London syllabus has recently been modified so as to enable candidates to specialise either in philology or in literature. Candidates who specialise in literature, however, must study a large number of Old and Middle English texts, including the whole of *Beowulf*. The Oxford syllabus follows a rather similar pattern, but offers a wider choice and does not burden the literary specialist with so many Old English texts, but here also all candidates are required to show "a competent knowledge of the English Language at all periods, including Old English (Anglo-Saxon)". The Cambridge English Tripos does not profess to be a school of "Language and Literature". One of the most prominent and valuable features of this examination is a series of papers on the "Life, Literature, and Thought" of periods extending from 1066 to 1798. These papers include questions on social history, and religious, artistic, and philosophic movements as well as literature. For instance, a paper on the Middle Ages tests the students' knowledge of chivalry and the lives of Benedictine monks and Franciscan friars as well as of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and the alliterative poems, while a paper on the eighteenth century gives scope for a candidate to write on deism and methodism as well as on the prose of Swift and the poetry of Cowper. Anglo-Saxon and Early Norse are not compulsory subjects. They actually belong to the syllabus of the Archaeological and Anthropological Tripos, but can be taken as alternative options in the English Tripos. Another alternative option is a paper in French and Italian set books. Parts of the Cambridge syllabus likely to be particularly valuable for the student who intends to be a teacher of English are the papers in "Literary Criticism" where unseen passages are set for comment and appreciation (Part I) and the paper in "Criticism and Composition" (Part II). It may also be noted that the Preliminary Examination includes a paper on "The Use of English",

while an English essay has to be written by candidates in both parts of the Tripos examination. The nearest approach to the Cambridge English Tripos in the provincial Universities is to be found, perhaps, not in the "Honour Schools of English Language and Literature" but in the "two subject" Honours degree courses such as the Bristol Honour course in English and Philosophy, or the Birmingham Honour courses in "Grouped Subjects". The London General Arts degree course, as it stands at present, is not satisfactory. It consists of three entirely unrelated subjects, and the syllabuses are simply abbreviated versions of those of the Honours degree examinations. A reformed "General Degree" course in three subjects, such as English, French, and Philosophy, properly co-ordinated, might be in a very valuable preparation for the teacher of English.

The ideal academic training for a teacher of English would probably be an Honours degree course of the Cambridge rather than of the London type, with stress laid on the study of contemporary society, a wide view of literature, and a grasp of the nature and functions of language, or else a "Two Subject" or "Grouped Subject" course in which English literature would be studied in connection with philosophy or a modern language, though options should be available for the rare student with a real bent for philology. An improved Training College course extended to three years and pursued in a college closely linked to a University might be a very good alternative.

There are cogent arguments for a two-year training course after graduation, but this, added to the usual degree course of two or three years, would extend the teacher's preparation to an impracticable length. We must therefore accept one year as the length of the training course.

It is common for the academic course to be sharply divided from the training course. In the former the student is assumed to be pursuing this subject for its own sake (though most undergraduates now regard the degree as a

professional qualification), and in the latter he is devoting himself to the problem of teaching it. This abrupt transition is disturbing to many students who have suddenly to re-value their knowledge, to find its relevance to the classroom task, to face difficult questions about their individual responses to literature and their own critical apparatus. Many students are faced for the first time with the problem of using their knowledge for purposes other than an examination.

One solution is to plan the whole four-year course as a single unit so that the final year is devoted to the discussion of principles already implicit or explicit in the previous course with a view to applying them directly to the work of teaching. To this 'professionalisation' or 'functionalisation' of University courses strong objections are raised, though it might be remarked that no one regards with apprehension the 'functionalisation' of University courses in medicine or law. Sooner or later the Universities will have to face this question of the academic-professional dichotomy, because it raises fundamental issues about the nature of our society and the relation of education to social needs, but we cannot debate this wider controversy here.

We can, however, without embarking on a radical revision of the University course, secure a closer relation between the academic and the professional aspects of the preparation of the English teacher. We have argued that some study of contemporary society, a wider view of literature, and a grasp of the nature and functions of language are now required as essential parts of the equipment of the teacher of English. But they also enrich his appreciation and understanding of his own subject. The study of contemporary society helps directly the study of modern literature, and by contrast, the literature of the past, while at the same time it promotes understanding of the influences which press daily upon the pupils, moulding their interests, tastes, and development at every point. The study of language illuminates the relation between writer

and reader, which is the main concern of literary study, while it is also a preparation for that emphasis on the pupil and his response which the study of educational psychology will amplify in the final year of training.

We suggest therefore that the "Academic" course for students of English language and literature should include :

- (1) Social studies in the evolution of society which might coincide with, or precede, the parallel studies in literature.
- (2) The study of language, especially of contemporary usage, with exercises in expression and "practical criticism".
- (3) Special seminars for aesthetic and ethical studies in relation to literature and linked with (1) and (2).
- (4) Speech training and practice in oral reading and dramatic work.

These courses must be planned jointly by the Departments of English, Philosophy, Social Studies, and Education, so that they effectively illuminate one another, and are not just a loading of the time-table with additional and discrete subjects.

In the final year the elements of the course would be :

- (1) The Philosophy of Education.
- (2) The Educational System of England and its growth since 1800, related to previous work in social studies.
- (3) Educational Psychology (including systematic observation of individual children) with additional special studies which are relevant to the teaching of English and developed from the earlier work in the psychology of language. These special studies should include the following topics :
 - (a) The stages of language development in children.
 - (b) Aesthetic development, related where possible to other arts as well as the language-arts.

- (c) The operation of imagination, fantasy, and reason in expression and comprehension.
- (4) The principles and methods of teaching English. In this course the studies of the aims of education, of the psychology of the pupils, and of the educational system and its relation to society will all be directed towards establishing the aims and the principles on which sound methods of teaching are to be based. This part of the work must be closely related to school practice.

The proposal of the McNair Report that experienced teachers should be seconded to assist in the training of teachers is a valuable one both for the training institutions and for the development of closer co-operation between them and the schools.

No course of training can, of course, do more than introduce intending teachers to their work. All that can be done is to make them aware of the nature of the task and its problems and help them to work out the lines of thought and experiment that will produce fruitful work in the classroom. For most students a few weeks of practice is not enough to make even the main problems clear, and this seriously reduces for them the reality of discussions of method. It is impracticable to lengthen the course by the inclusion of a longer period of practice, and in any case the conditions of such practice must be more or less artificial, because the student-in-training cannot be in a position of real responsibility.

The difficulty can be met in two ways. The school in which the teacher obtains his first appointment should undertake fuller responsibility for his guidance and should appoint senior members of its staff who have time and interest to devote to helping the beginner. This guidance should then be followed up by opportunities to attend refresher courses, provided on a much more liberal scale than in the past, and by the granting of extended leave of

absence so that teachers of some experience may return to full-time study with the leisure to undertake a thorough reconsideration of their teaching task, undistracted by the daily pressure of the immediate necessities of the classroom.

The far-reaching changes proposed in the 1944 Act, the extension of education in new forms to adolescents and adults, make this reconsideration an urgent matter, and it is to be hoped that more and more teachers of English will feel their responsibility for the encouragement of research in the aims and methods of teaching English.

THE END

